THE MARRIAGE OF CAPTAIN KETTLE

C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

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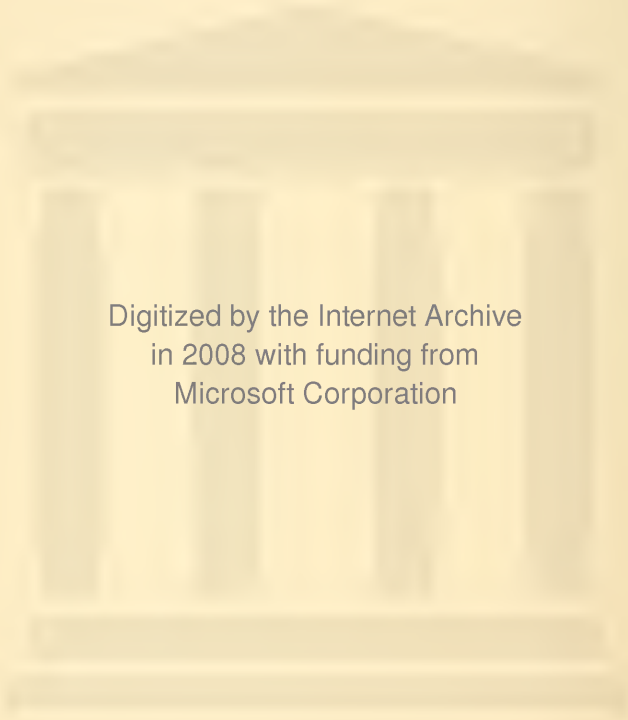
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THE MARRIAGE OF CAPTAIN KETTLE

By

C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

Author of

ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN KETTLE,
McTODD, ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
J. W. ROBSON

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THE MARRIAGE OF CAPTAIN KETTLE

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CHAPTER I

NO COAL

"YOU flat-footed Senegambian," said Mr. Kettle, the Mate, "if you drop any more of that green paint on my decks, I'll make you go down on your knock-knees and lick them clean. I don't believe you've ever seen a winch before, much less painted one. And yet you have the nerve to sign on here as A.B."

"I always accustomed, sar, to put on paint wid a brush. I don't consider a wad of waste a proper gentleman's tool."

"Answer me back, would you, you plum-colored son of a palm-nut? I'd like to point out just here — that I don't — allow — deck-hands whether they be white, yellow, snuff and butter-colored — or just plain black — to give me any back talk — so long as I am Mr. Mate of this packet. And don't you — forget it."

The sentence was punctuated with hard kicks be-

stowed by a neatly pipe-clayed shoe on any part of the huge vicious-looking negro's anatomy that the little officer could reach. The man had drawn the knife from the sheath at the back of his belt, and was openly prepared for murder. But the mate gave him no chance to use it. He chased him about the decks with such vigor and venom that the fellow could not turn round to strike, and when at last the man tripped over a steam-pipe and the knife went flying, Mr. Kettle instead of pitching it overboard, kicked it contemptuously back to its owner.

"There's your knife. Put it back in its sheath, or I'll smash you some more. And now get back to your work."

"Yes, sar."

"Understand how to lay on paint with a wad of waste?"

"Yes, sar."

"Get ahead then."

The negro painted with diligence and skill, leaving the surface he touched a fine rasping green, with no superfluous paint that would subsequently run and grow ropy, and cutting clean straight lines at his edges. It is a high art to paint accurately with a wad of cotton-waste, and many men, including the house-painter, have it not. But steamer tradition says that the African negro when he paints shall not use a brush, and the sea sumptuary laws are severe. So the negro is forced to learn the skill of his hands with the homelier instrument.

"Mr. Kettle?"

"Sir."

The mate looked aft to the upper bridge, and beheld there the blowsy head and still blowsier tobacco-pipe of Captain Saturday Farnish.

"Will you come to the chart house a minute?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The inside of the s.s. *Norman Towers'* chart house smelt of clothes and varnish. Its walls were decorated with a shelf of professional works; an oil-painting of the *Norman Towers* in impossible colors on an impossible sea, from the brush of an Eastern artist; and the cabinet portrait of a large pleasant-faced lady in bursting satins, this last being Mrs. Saturday Farnish.

Captain Farnish lowered himself into a large red velvet arm-chair, which lurched dangerously as it met his weight.

"That starboard caster off again," he grumbled. "Chips must have mended it five times this trip alone."

"The carpenter's inefficient, sir," said his chief officer stiffly. "He needs keeping up to his job. If you'll let me take him in hand, I'll undertake he does the thing thoroughly this time. I'll make him a good carpenter, sir, if you'll let me have the handling of him. I could make the *Towers* look a different boat, sir, by the time we reach Liverpool, if you'd let me have full use of the carpenter."

"And never have him come near the old packet

again? No, you don't, Mr. Kettle, me man. I've had Chips sailing with me six years now, and I like him. He's idle, but he understands the boat, and he's got a neat trick with that penny whistle."

"He can blow tunes out of that whistle," the chief officer admitted grudgingly, "and that's a fact. But as a carpenter he's a holy fraud. Look here, sir, if you want a smart ship —"

"I don't. I want a comfortable one. What's the clock? Five-and-twenty to twelve. Dash my whiskers! But that's five minutes after the time for my 'morning'."

He got up, took a whisky bottle and tumbler from inside the folding wash-stand, and poured himself out an accurate three fingers, holding the glass to the light so as to be sure of the measure. He added water to within a finger's breadth of the top, drank a third of the mixture, and resumed his seat with a sigh, glass in hand.

"That just gets to the spot where my old fever left a hole. I hope you will always enjoy good health, Mr. Kettle, me man, and not want a 'morning' till you're master of your own ship and have a mate to do the work for you. If you stick to Horner's Perfect Cure, that Mrs. Farnish brought you up on, you'll have little to complain of in the way of internal trouble."

"Thank you, sir, I'm pretty regular. I put in my two doses of Horner's every week, and reap the benefit. As for a 'morning', a chief officer's pay on a

tramp simply won't run to it, if he takes a bottle of beer with his dinner."

"Especially if he wants to save up for his evenings ashore when he feels it's up to him to give the girls a treat." Captain Farnish winked a damp eye. "Pretty little piece that you were trotting round Cathedral Square in Vera Cruz, Owen, me man."

The mate laughed. "She was giving me Spanish lessons, sir. But I didn't know we met you."

"I was sitting under the Hotel Diligencia piazza having a social glass with the boss stevedore. There was a little matter of a bit of cumshaw which it seems you were too proud to take —"

"I accept charity from no man."

"Well, I'm not so stuck-up, and when Miss Right comes along, and you marry and have a houseful of youngsters, you'll stuff notes into your pocket-book when they're offered, me man. Not that I blame you for sparking the señorita. I've danced 'em round myself when I was your age, and was a fine buck mate with a brand-new master's ticket aching to be used. I wore long side-whiskers then, and the girls thought 'em awfully fetching."

Captain Farnish chuckled till he had to wipe away the reminiscent tear with the broad back of his hand. "Fetching, by gad! I should think I was. But you've heard the old woman tuning up on that string when she's been mad with me."

"Yes, sir," said the chief officer respectfully, "and I took a note of it at the time for future reference."

Each caught the other's eye, and laughed. Owen Kettle was the son of Captain Farnish's old skipper, and after the old man went down with his ship in the China Seas, the Farnishes had brought up the boy with their own children. Mrs. Farnish ruled that household with a rod of Malacca, and during Captain Saturday Farnish's brief spells ashore, when his tongue had been lubricated into indiscretions, he often received stripes even in the bosom of his family, as all Merseyside Terrace, Birkenhead, knew full well, to his grim amusement.

Even now the narrow house in the narrow street across the river at Liverpool was the only place that Kettle considered as home throughout all the marches of the universe, and though the chance of service had thrown him on the *Norman Towers* as chief officer to his own foster-father, and though they addressed one another by those formal titles which the hard and fast etiquette of the sea sets out in its rubrics, there remained under the surface much of the old careless, if undefined affection.

"Well," said Captain Farnish, "as the old woman isn't here to object — God bless her! — and we seem to have made a goodish run, I think I'd repeat the prescription. You might make it up, me man. It'll be practice for you when you have a ship of your own, and have to know how to pour out whisky without overloading the dose. And put the bottle back on its shelf, and shut the wash-stand, so's my steward isn't tempted. Well, here's —"

But Captain Farnish's genial toast remained unvoiced, and he sat back heavily in the big broken-springed velvet chair, with the beverage slopping over the edge of his tumbler.

Kettle followed his gaze. Framed in the brass ring of a port was the bilious face of Mr. Andrew Little, the chief engineer, and in front of it the black and damnatory forefinger of Mr. Little pointing to the tumbler.

"At it again," muttered the mate. And then as the face and the finger whisked away, "Shall I go and attend to him?" he asked.

"No, no, me man, thank you all the same. He'll pull round if we give him time."

"He'll be ramping round the decks preaching hell-for-sinners for any grinning idiot who comes to hear, inside ten minutes. His latest craze is that all who do not starve themselves are doomed to perdition. Fancy an officer, even though he be an engineer, telling that to a gang of old sailors who are ramping to get their full Board of Trade whack. I don't think it's good for the chief's inside to be allowed the run of his tongue when these luny fits come on him, and I'm certain it's bad for the discipline of the ship."

"Very difficult thing to coerce a chief engineer, as you'll learn, Mr. Kettle, me man, when you get a ship of your own. You can't send him to his room without entering the circumstance in the log, and that means wasting time over explanations at the office ashore when you might be sitting with your wife at

a music-hall. My motto's always try for the line of least resistance."

"Mr. Little's dangerous."

"Very likely, Mr. Kettle, me man, very likely. But I tackle trouble when it comes. I don't go and hunt for it like you do, and it's astonishing how much one slips out of if one follows that principle. There's that nigger, for instance, that you were stubbing your toe against half an hour ago."

"He's a bad nigger that, bone idle, and saucy as a German baron. But I'll make him into a good dog before I'm through with him."

"Did he ever try to knife you before?"

"Only twice that I could be sure of."

"Then why in thunder didn't you fling his weapon over into the ditch when you had it there lying on the deck before you?"

"Because I intended to show the swine I wasn't afraid of him."

"I believe you really like trouble."

The little mate sighed deeply, "I am afraid I do, sir."

"I wonder where you got your taste from. It couldn't be from your upbringing. I'm sure you never got a hankering for trouble from either me or the old woman, though when one comes to think of it, your pore father —"

"Yes, sir?"

"Well, he was Welsh, Owen, me man, and we'll leave it at that. But I will say that at any rate there's

nothing of the thief about you, and I never caught you in a lie in all your life — Well, Mr. Mate, don't let me keep you from your duty."

With which formal dismissal Captain Saturday Farnish drank the rest of his whisky and water, closed his eyes, opened his mouth, and was promptly asleep.

The smart, keen, chief officer stepped out into the sunshine, and from place to place on the seedy undermanned steamer went about his many duties, walking crisply, talking crisply, getting a maximum of work done with the limited means at his disposal. They were voyaging from Vera Cruz to Liverpool; had passed out of the Gulf Stream through the Bahamas, south of the island of Abaco, by that channel known to the Western Ocean sailor folk as the Hole in the Wall; and were well out in the Sargasso Sea.

So far as the eye could see the only things that floated on the turquoise blue swells were bunches of orange-yellow weed. The steamer's rusty black bows sawed regularly up and down, always pushing a crumbling cascade of white water ahead of her. In sea phrase she carried a good bone in her teeth, and in and out of this played iridescent flying-fish of the bigness and shape of dragon-flies. Other flying-fish like silver rats skimmed along the sleek blue hollows of the swells, and plunged with a splash into the next uprearing hillside. And astern and overhead seven gulls held steady station, and could be depended on to keep convoy till the gulls on the Azores beat met them in the wastes of mid-ocean, and took over relief.

On to the top of the fiddley a grimy fireman presently clambered, one corner of his sweat rag between his teeth, and slued round a ventilator to catch more of the breeze.

A deck-hand, who was setting up funnel stays, turned his head. "That's the fourth time you ash cats have been up here messing with the ventilators this watch. And the wind's not shifted half a point. Is it a game?"

"It's a mighty poor game. We're firing on the sweepings of the bunkers, and it's horses' work to keep steam in her."

"Well, it's your job, not mine — praise the Lord! — but it's struck me before that your old coffee-mill's not running her usual revolutions. Just give the chief my kind dooty, and say I'll be glad if he'll broach a new bunker and give you some good hard coal to fire on. You're blowing all this sludge clean out of the stack, and it drops on our decks, and it's up to us to sweep it into the ditch. You may tell him to — Whisht! There's the mate."

The fireman stumped off down steel ladders out of sight, the deck-hand worked with intense application at setting up his funnel stay, and Mr. Kettle, the Mate, went below to bring up his sextant for the midday sight. The heat of the engines certainly was slacking. He wondered why. The reason would have to be entered up under "distance run according to engine-room reckoning" when the chief handed in his day's report, and even easy-going Captain Saturday

Farnish could not avoid officially commenting upon it. But it was no affair of the deck officer's — and Kettle dropped it from his mind. He was always a very keen stickler for the rigid steamer etiquette which states that the engine-room shall not meddle with the deck, and the deck shall have no truck with the engine staff except for purely deck purposes.

So the *Norman Towers'* chief officer took his sextant from its box in the rack over his berth, gave it a rub over with its own piece of wash-leather — he was a very natty man about his trade utensils — went out on deck, and gave a warning knock at the chart-house door.

"Five minutes to noon, sir."

The elderly second mate, who couldn't have worked out a sight if his life had depended on it, was looking wise over his instrument and fiddling with the smoked glasses; the smart, young, school-bred third was nervously fidgeting away to make sure the sun did not play tricks on him by making a sudden lunge downward before he brought it to the horizon; and then out shambled Captain Farnish, blowsy and slippered, and put up his sextant also, like the practised old man of the sea he was.

All four of them solemnly stared, working the vernier screws each according to his temperament, and then Farnish went in to his chronometer, and gave out the Greenwich time. The mates went below to work out the reckoning (which the second, by the way, laboriously copied from Kettle), and in due time these

were handed into the chart house, and from them Captain Farnish marked up on the chart the *Norman Towers'* position on the face of the waters. He never worked out the figures for himself. As he said, he knew a good mate when he saw one, and it helped a lad on to give him a bit of responsibility. And after this it was his custom to add another ten minutes' sleep to the short doze he had already enjoyed, so as to have a quarter of an hour's rest to the good before dinner.

But this day a portent was showing itself that even his easy-going temperament could not afford to overlook. The engines had long since dropped that steady uniform rub-a-rumble rub-a-rumble which a steamer's engines should keep up from port to port (or at any rate, from soundings to soundings), and were giving forth that labored kick-and-a-cough which one only hears in narrow waters and crowded traffic. And even this was slowing down.

Further, there was obvious trouble among the engine-room staff. The slender watches of firemen and trimmers were bunched on the fiddley-top; the second and fourth engineers, both very young men, both pasty-faced, were standing outside the engine-room door in the port alleyway, openly perturbed, obviously ignorant of what to do next.

The second mate discovered it was his watch below and dived there like a rabbit; number three was watch-officer on the bridge; but Kettle instinctively closed up on his captain. There was something in his nature

which always forced him to get close to the storm-center when trouble was brewing.

"I don't like it, Mr. Kettle, me man," Captain Farnish kept on saying, "I don't like it at all. That infernal Mr. Little has been at some of his mad tricks again, and scared all those ash cats out of their greasy lives. If I send for the fellow, and he's one of those luny fits on him, he'll preach offensively to me on the need of fasting, and it'll mean a row; and if I don't send for him he'll as like as not keep us rolling on here till I do send for him, and that'll take some explaining at Liverpool; and between you and me, Mr. Kettle, me man, I'm in a devil of a fix."

The chief officer said, "Yes, sir," which was all he could say. For any underling to give advice to a ship's captain unless asked for, would probably bring about a cyclone there and then while the words were being uttered.

"Let me see. Did I have my 'morning'?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm, perhaps better not have a second before dinner. I wish that infernal chief engineer would get an expert to wrestle with his soul ashore, instead of bringing such useless dunnage as an out-o'-repair soul to sea,—the blooming crazy nuisance. I ought to have sent him to hospital at Vera Cruz, but it would have meant a lot of letter-writing, and cabling, and signing a stack of consular papers. I hate signing papers; you never know what they let you in for. Besides you know what the firm is; if I'd got rid of

Little, as likely as not they'd have saddled me with one of those newfangled chiefs, who'd want to go shares in my legitimate profits. You take it from me, Mr. Kettle, me man, they're swine,— these new technical-school engineers."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't like to send for him, but I suppose I'd better hear what he has to say. Could you — er — just get him into the chart house here, Mr. Kettle?"

"Yes, sir, I understand. Quite informally. Better not send a message. I'll go for him myself."

"That's the idea, Mr. Kettle, me man, and bring him back yourself, and then stand by while we talk."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The mate walked briskly out, and made for the two white-faced juniors who were standing at the engine-room door.

"The chief's in his room," said one of them.

"My God, Kettle, he means death for every man on board," said the other.

"Oh, don't worry your small heads about that," said the mate confidently. "The old man's quite competent to attend to Mr. Little and the ship, too."

The chief engineer's room was just inside the door, and stood at the head of the ladder which led to the depths of the engine-room below, and at this moment the man himself appeared. He was stark naked, his face drawn and white, his body thin as an Indian fakir's. He had a cook's broad meat ax in his hand,

and his lips were drawn back from his teeth like those of a snarling dog.

The mate delivered his message as though such a get-up was the most ordinary uniform of shipboard life.

"Captain Farnish sends his compliments, sir, and would be glad to see you in the chart house."

"Stand out of my path."

"At once, sir, he said."

"Stand aside."

"Perhaps, if you're not feeling very well this morning, sir, you would allow me take your arm."

The madman rushed and made a vicious slash with his ax. Kettle dodged, and the blow skimmed his sleeve. Then, with the lightning quickness of a man who had been used all his life to rough and tumble fighting, he jumped for the engineer and tried to trip him to the deck. But he could get no hold. Mr. Little had rubbed himself from head to foot with oil till he was as slippery as an eel, and, moreover, he had all of a madman's strength. Kettle found himself slimed from top to toe, and flung violently against the iron side of the house, and Little raced away forward, ax in hand.

"For God's sake let him go," said the second engineer, "and let's hope he jumps overboard. He's as good as murdered the whole lot of us."

"What do you mean? Has he put dynamite in your coffee-mill down there or something? Here you,

both of you, if there's anything wrong with the engines, get below at once and put it straight."

But the engineers did not move.

"It's worse than that," said the spokesman gloomily. "He's done us in the eye over the coal. He made us believe there were two more bunkers full, easily enough for the run home to Liverpool, and like d——d fools we believed him. You see, we only joined at Vera Cruz. He'd run all his engineers and stoke-hold crew out of the ship, because — well because —"

"Oh, get a move on you."

"Well, there isn't half a ton of coal left on the boat, and we're in the loneliest part of all the lonely seas, and here I guess we'll stay till we rot. There isn't one chance in ten thousand of any steamer turning up that could tow us into port or even take us off. . . . My God! look at that bubbly yellow weed over the side there."

CHAPTER II

THE VOYAGE OF THE LIFE-BOAT

"THIS," said Captain Saturday Farnish, "is the end of me professionally. I shan't be able to keep up my insurance, and if I die, it will mean workhouse for the old woman." He tried to steady himself for a moment and then hiccoughed behind his hand. "I shall apply for a chapel keeper's job with the Calvinistic Methodists when I get ashore. It's about what I'm fit for, and they ought to give it me if attendance and subscriptions are remembered in one's favor."

"Oh, things will come all right, sir, at the office when they're explained," said the mate. "You aren't a doctor. You can't be responsible for Mr. Little going off his head."

"When you have been at sea longer, Owen, me man, you'll understand that a shipmaster is expected to be doctor, lawyer, commercial agent, and clerk of the weather, and if he fails at any one of those jobs or at forty others when they come along, he's sacked (although he may have been with the firm for forty years), and there are ten men waiting in the outer office, ready to take on his billet for less pay. It's a dog'sh life, the sea, Owen, me man, and on a voyage

one is seldom able to get a full whack of sleep. That remindsh me, I think I'll just have a peg and 'ndulge 'n a few minutes' snoosh. 'S nothing else to be done. Presently, when we begin to starve, I s'pose I shall have to stand round and see that the men don't eat one another."

"There's Mr. Little, sir, on the fore crosstrees. Any message, sir?"

Captain Farnish looked drearily at the broken caster of his easy-chair, and tried without success to stifle another hiccough. "If I could only get the beggar to his room."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the mate briskly, "I'll tell him you order him to go there," and with that betook himself to the outer deck, and closed the chart-house door on to the hook behind him.

On the main deck below there were gathered the whole of the *Norman Towers'* company — mates, engineers, the cook, the baker, stewards, the lamp man, boatswain, the idle carpenter, the grimy trimmers and firemen, the all-nation deck-hands; and high upon the steamer's drab foremast, perched ridiculously on the clumsy iron crosstrees, the white naked body of the chief engineer stood out vividly against the cobalt of the midday sky. He was preaching to the congregation in an elaborately conventicle voice, and they, with the seafarers' susceptibility to sudden, hot, religious influences, were listening with straining ears.

Mr. Kettle, the Mate, ran crisply down the ladder. "Clear a gangway here, you sons of fools," he or-

dered sharply. And then, "Fore crosstrees, there! Captain's orders, sir; will you go to your room at once?"

By not so much as the flicker of an eyelash did the madman show that he had heard the interruption. He mouthed on with his discourse. The sun, staring from the hot sky above, was already beginning to scorch the skin of his white back to an angry pink.

"Fast, I tell you," he thundered down at his listeners, "fast if ye would find salvation; and that there shall be no backsliders I, even I have thrust fasting upon you. There is food left upon this ship, yea and drink also, both strong and otherwise, such as may endure for the space of two weeks, and after that woe, woe to the man that shall not take to fasting with prayer and free will. Hell shall have him hungry."

"Just because you can't do arithmetic accurately, Mr. Little," said the mate acidly, "we may starve, and men may die, but each one will have to report wherever he lands that he's got there because of an engineer who's incompetent at his job."

"I'm as capable at my profession as any engineer on all the seas. I accept criticism from no brass-edged cargo-tallier whatever, and I'll baptize you with blood, my son, when I've finished attending to the heathen. Wherefore listen, all ye that are still unregenerate and addicted to gluttony. Fast, I say unto you, fast from this day onward while food is still around you, and abstinence is not forced upon you

by famine, and the greater reward in the hereafter shall be yours."

"Mr. Little, there is no getting over the fact of your incompetence. I've seen the evidence of it myself in your own shaky handwriting, and signed by your own name. Now you'll agree with me that no man that had ever been taught to write could scrawl as illiterate a signature as yours."

The madman lifted his ax, and was evidently in half a mind to throw it — which was what Mr. Kettle, the Mate, was angling for. But the wandering eyes of his congregation drew him back.

"Oh, ye of little concentration," he shouted, "by what loose threads are your bits of souls tethered! By skirt ye are led ashore, by a small-sized mate ye are driven at sea, and me ye will not attend to, yea, thought I offer ye salvation. But by the sun above that now scorches me, *ego, vos precedens,* will drag you after me to Paradise."

"You couldn't do it," said the mate. "You're as incompetent either to lead or to drive in the straight path, as you are to make out an accurate estimate of distance run, and coal remaining in bunkers. Man, there's no getting over the evidence of your own daily engine-room reports. They'd disgrace a bigamist, sailing his first trip in a dago tramp's stoke-hold. They —"

"*Whiz!*" came the ax, winking as it span downward through the southern sunlight. The mate dodged it deftly, and it skated along the decks be-

tween two shrinking lines of men, and then plucking a greenheart belaying-pin from the rail, he ran forward and swung himself into the fore rigging.

He went up the ratlines at racing speed, and the naked man on the crosstrees leaped to his feet, and stood balancing there with one hand on the starboard topmost shroud, swaying to the roll of the ship.

"You are bringing me food," he screamed; "you shall not make me lose my high-class soul by forcing me to break my fast. I will swim to Liverpool, and report you to the Board of Trade."—And with that, waiting cannily till the *Norman Towers* rolled to starboard, and the deep blue of the Sargasso Sea lay beneath him, he jumped outward, and dived feet foremost.

Mr. Kettle's action was prompt enough. Even while the madman was in mid-air, he hailed the officer of the watch to lower away the starboard quarter-boat. Then slipping quickly down himself, he ran across the decks and looked over the rail. He knew that Mr. Little could swim, and only wished to reassure himself that he had not been stunned by his dive.

The *Norman Towers* had lost her way by this time, and lay in the trough of the great blue ocean swells leaking a thin trickle of steam. The spot where the engineer had hit the sea was marked by a patch of white which bubbled like soda-water. Mr. Kettle jumped to the rail and stood there poised. He was a poor man and always a dandy about his dress,

and as he had a cat's dislike for getting his clothes wet or soiled, he did not want to jump overboard and spoil a suit that he could ill afford to replace, unless the engineer plainly showed that he wanted assistance. So when the man's white face appeared, and he spat out a mouthful of weed and water and set off swimming at a sturdy side-stroke for the northeast, the mate sang out an ironical "Good voyage," and went to the upper deck to oversee the lowering of the quarter-boat.

The davits swung outboard, the tackles squeaked like a parcel of angry cats, the boat splashed into the water, unhooked and pushed off. Oars straddled out from her and beat the water unevenly. Slowly she scratched her way over the hill and dale of the sea. The engineer, when he heard the clank of the looms against the thole-pins, swam to the farther side of an islet of the orange-yellow weed, and it looked as if they were going to have trouble with him. But words passed in the boat, and one of the rowers shipped his oar and stood up. He picked up some small line which lay on the untidy floor boards, made a running bowline on one end, arranged some coils to his satisfaction, threw, and hauled taut. The man caught the engineer round the neck with his first heave, and (after the severe methods of the sea) choked the fight out of him before he brought him up through the clogging bubbly weed to the side of the boat. Thereafter the madman was brought on board, dried, dressed, and deposited in his own room, the door of

which a leisurely carpenter proceeded to decorate with hasp and padlock.

The mate marched smartly off to the chart house to report. He knocked, lifted the hook, and opened the door, and grasped the situation at a glance. Captain Saturday Farnish had indulged in that one more peg — and several others to ram it home.

The mate stepped inside, and this time shut the door closely. He drew curtains across the side windows that the curious might not look through, and then made his formal report.

"Chief engineer gone to his room, sir."

"You're a very capable off'sr — Owen, me man. Given you a most unpleasant job, I'm sure. Been with you in spirit all along but couldn't get on deck. Detained chart house, severe malarial symptoms. Fatal, expose sea air. Stayed in here very much against my will, taking neshessary drugs."

"Yes, sir, quite so. Second engineer reports it's quite true about the coal. I told him it was a trifle which would cost him his ticket, and as he was saucy I had to attend to him. But that doesn't get over the coal — and the grub. One we haven't got, the other we shall have less of every day."

"'Nless you can arrange for the sea-gulls to bring bath buns, like, wasn' it Joshua did, for the ravens?"

"My idea, sir, was that you'd like me to rig a life-boat, and go off and see if I couldn't pick up assistance. I was sure you'd think each moment was of importance, as every bit of delay means so much more food

and drink consumed, and you'd want me to be off at once."

"But where to, Owen, me man? You're not likely to find boat to tow us thish side New Jerusalem."

"There's some sort of a steam lane from the Northern Ports to the West Indies about twelve degrees south of where we are now, sir, and I concluded you'd like me to sail down to cut that, and then if I didn't see anybody, hold on backward and across till I did."

"You couldn't find the old packet again, once you'd left her. Much better stay 'n let's all starve comfortably together."

"I shall take note of the current sets and the wind from day to day, sir, and shal'n't be far out in calculating your drift. They rubbed that sort of thing pretty well into one in the navigation school. I think you may expect me back with assistance inside a week."

Captain Farnish applied a handkerchief to his eyes. "You'll excuse these tears, Owen, me man, but prospect mosht distressful. I always looked forward to a high-class funeral, Birkenhead Cemetery, with you and the old woman and the kids in the wake of the hearse, a sort of poem in white pocket-handkerchiefs and crape. 'S been one of the happy dreams of my life. Mosht distressing die out here like a black beetle in a kerosene can, unmourned, unwept for. And my steward tells me whisky's running out."

"Yes, sir, the *Towers*' going to be a dry ship till

I get back with relief. Then I may take it to be your wish that I should get under way at once?"

"At onche," said Captain Farnish with much gravity. "Scheme I've outlined to you, Mr. Kettle me — Mr. Kettle, me man, is outcome much anxious delib — dolab — I should say de-lib-er-ashun, and I have full confidence your ability carry it out. Full confidence. I may say fullest. Though suffering severe attack malarious shymptoms myself, as vide entry in log, still I have fullest confidence in mate of my own upbringing"— Captain Farnish's head dropped upon his breast, and he permitted himself to snore with relief.

"Then good-by, sir."

"Goo-by. I wasn't asleep, if that's your idea, and to prove it I give you las' word. My motto is 'Leave everything to the mate.' Remarkably confident — I should say com-pet-ent — man, my mate, Mis' Kell. As I said before, goo-by."

The big red velvet arm-chair in which Captain Saturday Farnish reposed jarred up and down on its broken caster with every roll of the ship, and before leaving, the mate took down Norie's *Epitome of Navigation* from the book-shelf, and shored it up on a steady base. Then he set his watch by the ship's chronometer, and went out once more on deck and gave crisp and lucid commands to those concerned in the rigging and victualing of the port life-boat.

His last action before leaving was to change the uniform that the chief engineer had slimed with oil for a fresh rig. It is not many men who would have

given thought for their clothes before starting on an open boat voyage in mid-Atlantic that could only be classed as desperate, but I can merely report Mr. Kettle as I found him.

The mate's choice of crew for the life-boat was also typical of the man. Skill would be needed for the trip, strength, endurance, and above all things, obedience. And yet Mr. Kettle, knowing to the full the weakness of every member of the *Norman Towers'* complement, deliberately picked as his associates the five worst men on board. He even included among them the black who only that morning had tried to knife him.

I could never extract from Kettle the reason for his selection, and so can only surmise. Two theories occur to me. Perhaps he took away those particular rapscallions with him in the boat so that there should be no chance of their annoying poor, weak, old Farnish on the *Norman Towers*. Perhaps he took them to enjoy the risk and luxury of taming them at close quarters. Indeed, both considerations must have weighed with him. But I believe it was the last that swayed him most. He was always a man with a singular taste for what he called "trouble".

When the life-boat was ready, Mr. Kettle looked up at the row of worried faces that stared down at him from the steamer's rail, gave a curt wave, and ordered his men to shove off.

"And now," said he, "do any of you farmers know how to sail a boat?"

It appeared that none of them did. They were steamer sailors all of them, able to drive a winch, paint and clean paint, take a wheel, or rig a derrick.

"Well," said the mate with an unkind grin, "I'll teach you, and when you next step ashore, if ever you get there, you'll be smart enough fore-and-afters to sail as deck-hands in an American Cup race. But dead or alive, you've just one use at present — and that's as ballast. Pile yourselves up to windward."

They did it sullenly.

"You with the bald head there, smile. D'ye hear me, you son of a can-opener? Smile, or by James, I'll knock your yellow teeth down your throat. Don't you dare to throw black looks at me. Now we'll just call watches. I'm captain, and I'll take the port. Jenkins, as you've the only clean face at your end of the boat, I'll appoint you chief officer, and you take the starboard watch. Let me see! I'll give you the Dutchman, and Baldy here, with the winning smile. And that leaves me Olsen and the Senegambian, who still thinks he's going to get that pig-knife of his into my ribs before we're through with this boat trip. Well, Mr. Jenkins, as we're shipping a good deal of water you can set your starbowlines to bail, and the port watch can shake out a reef. She'll carry a bit more canvas, if she's humored, and time's the essence of the contract just now if we're to save the *Towers*."

Rapidly behind them the disabled steamer dipped out of sight below the sierra of the horizon, and presently they had the heaving circus of ocean to them-

selves. Great orange-yellow islets of the Sargasso weed sprawled here and there over the rich blue of the water, and these, when possible, they avoided; iridescent flying-fish scuttered along beside them and before their bows; and astern a brace of sea-fowl that had detached themselves from the steamer's convoy, kept accurate station. The blackguardly crew found something vaguely disquieting in the presence of these birds, and at first observed their coming with gloomy silence, and then with articulate grumblings.

"Not here for nothing, them birds," said Baldhead. "They know a thing or two. It isn't for galley scraps they're following this boat."

"Dey say dose gulls is de ghosts of ole sailors trowned at sea," said Olsen. "I vonders vhat it feels like to fly?"

"They picks yo' eyes out befo' yo' daid," said the Carolina black. "I sho' don' like the neb of that bird dere to stabboard. He's mos' as bigs's a Tampico turkey-buzzard."

A puff of squall poured down against them. Kettle luffed not an inch but kept the boat rigidly on her course. The wave-tops (as he intended) poured in over the lee gunwale.

"Bail, you sinful malingerers," he bawled at them. "Bail and keep your legs dry and the ship afloat. I'll attend to your souls when the time comes. Mr. Jenkins, you come aft and take the lee tiller beside me. You've got to learn to handle the boat sometime, and a nice light breeze like this is just the time

to begin. There you are! Now you've got her all by your shivering self, and mind you keep her ramping full. Don't you dare to luff for a foot of wave-top."

The men were scared and sullen, and the method of their schooling was brutal, but they improved hour by hour. There was a spare tiller in the boat, a lusty cudgel of oak, and this the mate used vigorously over their heads and shoulders whenever they were slow, or dense, or in any way short of the perfect seaman. Discipline was carried on big-ship fashion. They fed at appointed hours on a sparing ration; they drank lime-juice in their musty water, as ordained by the British Board of Trade; and bells were struck every half-hour on a tin bucket with ding-dong regularity.

Twice they passed derelicts, stuck in the Sargasso eddy. The first was a steamboat with only her fore-part showing, green with sea-grasses. The other was a four-masted schooner spruce with new paint, obviously a new arrival. Here was a sea mystery that would have tempted the most incurious. Here also would be some very obvious pickings. But the crew were by this time under a good discipline and did no more than look longingly at her. They rose her over the horizon, drove past her, and dropped her under the horizon astern, and as Mr. Kettle, the Mate, made no suggestion of boarding, no one else dared to voice a hint in that direction.

They made their southing and got to the far side

of the steam lane without seeing smoke or spar of traffic, and then after beating tediously back and forth for another day, were overtaken by a gale which was too heavy for even the mate's hard daring to carry sail in. He held on, it is true, till his men were three parts dead with terror, and then with his boat half water-logged, rounded her to, and rode out the breeze to a sea-anchor of spars.

Twice during this blow they saw steamers to windward of them heading for the islands, and three brine-washed boats plunging eastward, but all were out of hail, or, what is more to the point, made no response to any signals Mr. Kettle or his men could fly.

Rain pelted down on them during the squalls, and they caught it in the sails, and decanted the grimy brackish proceeds into their water beakers. Flying-fish blew on board in the spindrift, and these they ate raw and wished there were more of them. And once a brace of bonitos followed the smaller fry, and they gorged on these and for once were pleasantly filled. The small amount of food they had brought from the *Norman Towers* had run out by this time, and they were all looking thin and miserable and wolfish.

When once more the gale ceased, and the boat under snugged-down canvas was again thrashing her way up to the steam lane which now lay to the northward, the crew were unwise enough to plan mutiny. They collected up forward and put their heads together, and from among them presently came Jenkins, half-shamefaced, half-defiant, and sat down aft.

"I stand by you, sir," he said to the mate.

"Of course," said Kettle, "you have to, since I made you an officer. And it will be good practice for you, though if I had been put to it, I could have handled the whole outfit without straining myself."

The others heard and their courage oozed; and when it came to the point they put as a request what they had intended to dish up as a command.

They were hungry, thirsty, miserable; the Sargasso was a desert; they were one and all covered with salt-water boils; provisions and water were all gone; and presently they would all die, and the boat would blow about on that unkind sea, a water-logged derelict full of corpses. If they ran for the nearest land, which would offer food, drink, shelter, warmth, they might yet escape with bare life. But it must be now, without a moment's delay . . . now . . . now.

Baldhead was the speaker. He was quite a young man, with a fine emotional touch to his oratory.

"Really finished?" the mate inquired when he had talked himself to a standstill.

"Yes, sir, that is what we have to say."

"And you said it very well. I wish I'd brought along the accordion. I should like to set that tale to music and hear you sing it — you son of a play-actress. You're overfed and underworked, that's what's the matter with you. You're spoiling for the want of a job, and, by James, I'm the man to give you one! This boat wants smartening up. So to begin with, you take your knife and scrape spars.

The Senegambian, who has also a knife which he's aching to use, will help you. Now jump, you sweep, or, by the living James, I'll knock more stars out of you with the tiller than ever were stuck up in the sky!"

They jumped. The others, unbidden, set about coiling ropes and cleaning the floor boards of unconsidered trifles of litter, and Mr. Kettle, the Mate, watched proceedings with an acid smile.

The men were all hollow-eyed and, with the exception of Baldhead, shaggy beyond belief. The hair of the rest had grown to an incredible length. Their beards bristled uncouthly. Their cheeks were streaked salt-white in the wrinkles. Their clothes, shabby and darned and rotten to start with, were shrunk and sea-bleached, and moreover torn to fantastic fluttering rags. The men had no heart among them for patching and mending on that desperate boat voyage.

Even Mr. Kettle, the usually immaculate mate, was little better than the others. The blue serge of his uniform was so impregnated with salt that no hand brushing would unbleach it; the brass buttons and gold lace were tarnished to a dingy green; a pocket was torn and dangled limply; and in more places than one, threads had rotted and the seams gaped. But worst of all were his cheeks and chin. These it had been his pride to shave "a day below". He had brought a razor with him in the boat, wrapped in an oiled rag to shelter it from rust. But the scour-

ing of the seas had been too much for the flimsy safeguard. The boat was sodden with sea water for days together, and the blade succumbed to the brine. Its surface discolored; its edge grew gapped, till to use it meant gory torment; and finally it refused even the semblance of duty. Mr. Kettle cursed and flung it savagely into a pursuing wave crest. And thereafter red bristles sprouted over his haggard face, and he loathed the sight of himself whenever he used the inside of his watchcase as a mirror when he combed his hair.

Baldhead, at these moments of the toilet, felt that he got a little of his own back. He would rub his smooth cheeks and chin, and smile thoughtfully at the horizon; and although the mate was quick to resent his insolence in practical shape, Baldhead always licked his salt-cracked lips appreciatively when the chance came round for his little play.

Luck, in the way of picking up a steamboat, was certainly hard with them; but luck decidedly came to their aid more than once when starvation seemed certain. I have mentioned the full meal they had on the big bonitos. Another day the impossible happened, and their two attendant sea-fowl altered course too suddenly, steered into one another, and dropped, disabled, into the water. Their bodies were eaten down to the last fiber, and the starving men cursed a mean heaven that had left the bones hollow instead of packing them with marrow.

But the great windfall was a crate of bananas,

washed overboard from some fruit-boat's deckload. They were big, coarse, West Indian bananas, but to the starved palates they were ambrosia. The men ate six apiece for the first meal, and felt that any hardships were worth going through to know a bliss like that.

It was at the next midday, while Jenkins sailed the boat and the mate was standing up with his sextant in the stern-sheets, that they saw a steamer's smoke over the saucer-rim of the horizon.

Presently they were able to make out the trucks of her masts, and thereafter they rose her rapidly. They were right in her track. Here was rescue at last.

The ragged crew in their joy stood up and danced, but Mr. Kettle, the Mate, had a fine sense of discipline. When he wanted baboon tricks he would let them know. In the meanwhile he wished them to carry on duty as before. "And send aft the Senegambian," said he.

"Sar?"

"Weren't you in a barber shop once, before shore got too hot and you had to come to sea?"

"Yes, sar. I'se a sure 'nuf tonsorial artist."

"Good. Not got the usual nigger's razor concealed about your person?"

"No, sar. Never carry such a thing."

"First United States nigger I ever met who didn't. Well, take that pig-knife you're so fond of, and borrow Baldy's, and sharpen yours against his. Savvy?"

"Yes, sar."

"That's right. Now use one blade against the other, scissor fashion, and trim my beard. I'll have it clipped torpedo shape."

The big evil-faced negro gasped. "Trim yo' beard?"

"That's what I said. If you do it well, I'll give you threepence. If you make a hash of it, I'm lam you with the tiller."

For an instant murder peeped out from the black man's onyx eyes. Mr. Kettle expected it, looked for it, and nodded acknowledgment. "You won't try and cut my throat, because you know I'd have those two eyes of yours gouged out before you got even started. Come now, my lad, get a move on, or we'll have that steamboat alongside."

The mate put out his chin, and the ex-tonsorial artist plied his trade. The other men watched with the eyes of fascination.

CHAPTER III

THE CHARITY OF THE SEAS

COBALT sky above, and the deep blue of the Sargasso Sea patched with islets of orange-yellow weed. On it a black steamer, high-bowed and stump-masted, surging along with a bone in her teeth toward the south and west. Also a white ship's life-boat, rigged with mildewed lug-sail and jib, and manned by a crew of gaunt scarecrows. The life-boat is lying-to across the steamer's track, and the steamer wears her standard compass on the top of a ten-foot mast painted banana-green. That is the picture to carry in mind.

. . . . . .

Mr. Kettle, the Mate, after regarding the truculent look of his red torpedo beard at many angles in the back of his watchcase, finally approved, dived in his pocket, and produced three green-stained pennies which he presented to his barber.

"Hope to have the continuance o' yo' custom, sar," said that artist, dusting the debris of the operation from his patron with professional sibilation.

"I'll recommend you to the warders," said the mate dryly, "when I call on visiting-days. Hands,

take in sail. Lower away smartly now. Unship that mast. Out oars; we mustn't keep that fellow waiting. He seems in a hurry. A Dutchman, too, to judge by that sawn-off smoke-stack. Give way."

Up till now the steamer had been bearing directly down upon them. But as she drew nearer she seemed to be sheering out of her course a trifle to the northward. There was a long heavy ocean swell running, and she yawed a good deal in her steering, and it was hard to make out exactly where she was aiming for; but Mr. Kettle, with an Englishman's contempt for the German mariner, set this down to the inefficiency of her wheel quartermaster and to the watch-officer who oversaw him.

The vessel was close aboard of them by this time and they could read her name, *Rhein,* in dull brass letters on the flaring curve of her bows. She had a high upper bridge, with three square-shouldered officers on it who swayed rigidly to the roll. One, a big fellow, with a fair spade-shaped beard and much uniform, was obviously the captain. He wore spectacles. He stared at the boat pointedly, but neither waved nor made other signs; and Mr. Kettle, to whom it was a point of honor not to make first advances, sat rigidly by his tiller and sent out no sign either.

The *Rhein* surged up, drew level, and passed. On the sterns of the boats that hung in her davits they read that her port was Hamburg, and probably every soul in the boat had hot thoughts about that city, but for long enough not a word was uttered.

The black man was the first to give tongue.

"Sar, sar," he yammered after the dwindling stern, while the life-boat rocked in the cream of the wake. "Mistah Captain, for de love o' Gawd don't leave us. I tell you for true we's starvin'. Oh, sar, stop yo' steamah! Hi, you son-of-a-dog-of-a-Dutchman, we's gwine for to die if you don' stop'n pick us up."

Then his boat mate, the German, chimed in, cursing the *Rhein* and all she carried in a tongue that ought to have appealed to her. And to him were added all the boat's complement with one exception as chorus. But Mr. Kettle, the Mate, sat by the tiller without a word, and without change of countenance.

As she drew out of earshot, a white-faced man with an inflamed nose ran aft along the steamer's decks, and stood on her taffrail holding on by the ensign staff. He howled out sentences which they could not catch, and waved a grimy hand. Then a woman came and joined him, her skirts blowing out shrewdly in the wind of the steamer's passage. She also waved her hand and shouted, and though the tones of her shriller voice reached them, they could not make out the words. And every instant the steamer grew smaller and more distant.

The crew of the life-boat still shouted and sobbed and danced, but presently the grim little mate pulled them up sharply enough with a curt command for "Silence in the boat!"

"If you've all quite finished giving a free variety show for that painted Dutchman, perhaps you'll re-

step that mast, and let's be getting under way again. We've no more time to waste!"

Baldhead flopped to a heap on the floor boards. "What's the good?" he muttered. "We're as good as dead now."

"You may be," snapped the mate. "I'm not. I've got to live for a lot of things; among others to pay my compliments to that glass-eyed skipper with the tow beard, and to skin that pirate with the incandescent nose who mocked at me from the poop staff. By James, if you swivel-kneed blighters are going to weaken now and let those skunks live unpunished, I'm not. I'm going to teach them sea manners if I go to Berlin and set fire to their blessed emperor's palace to do it.— Step that mast, you jelly-backed sons of sin."

CHAPTER IV

THE WATCH ON THE "RHEIN"

THOUGH black despair rose heavy on the shoulders of the marooned crew, white-hot rage thrilled through every artery of their officer's small body. It was not so much the brutal desertion, which left them to perish there in the desert of the ocean that affected him, as the insolence of a mere German daring to do this thing.

Like all Britons and Americans who use the sea, he looked down upon the Dago and the Dutchman as inferiors in craft, wit, pluck, and bodily strength. Time after time he had driven whole crews of these men to do his bidding with no heavier weapons than a greenheart belaying-pin and a mouthful of hard words, so that for a Dutchman to disregard his signal — his urgency signal — was unbelievable.

He re-rigged his boat, and once more got her under way. But passion did not interfere with his clearness of head. For a sea-sodden ship's life-boat to give chase to a steamboat, however low her power, was ridiculous. The mate was the last man on earth to wish for this. His plan was to patrol once more the steam lane, pick up a more genial rescuer, and

take her off to the help of the *Norman Towers*, as already arranged; and to this end (and with the aid of the oak tiller) he once more hammered his disheartened crew into activity and submission.

But half-way to the horizon hung a portent which for long enough he disregarded. The *Rhein* had shown them her stern, had steamed away, and grown smaller and smaller still. But at a certain point this diminution lost its fixed progression; and the vessel lay there sawing up and down over gentle swells, and remaining of a constant bigness.

Between boat and steamer lay many blue acres of the Sargasso Sea, patched here and there with neat gardens of orange-yellow herbage; and the fact of her having come to a standstill was slow in making itself understood. The men glared after the steamer sullenly, resentfully, mutteringly; and not till their officer had made the discovery himself, and called upon them to flatten in sheets so that the life-boat might bear up in her wake, did the fact of her stoppage dawn upon them.

The change in their demeanor was natural enough. Jenkins and the German stood up together, twined arms, and footed it in an uncouth dance. Olsen, the Dane, fainted. Baldy dropped to his knees, shut his eyes tight, and babbled incoherent prayers. The big gross negro alone was ungrateful. He stared after the *Rhein* with bared teeth and starting eyeballs; he muttered evilly to himself; and presently, slipping a hand to the knife sheath beneath his belt, he drew

his weapon, and made vicious stabs with it into the bodies of imaginary enemies.

The little mate watched all this with a grim smile, and the life-boat had run half a mile over the cobalt swells before he gave speech.

"I suppose," said he, "that most of you ducks think that glorified Dutchman is smitten with sudden pangs of hospitality. Don't you believe it. He's broken down, and I guess the Senegambian here with the Sheffield ware is the only sinner in the boat, barring myself, who's tumbled to it."

"Yes, sar," said the black, "an' I'se gwine to slice his liver out."

"You will cut just what parts of his anatomy I order, neither more nor less. In the meanwhile put that cutlery out of sight. D'you hear me? That's a good nigger. Now all hands, listen. We're going to range up alongside, and we're going to board. I don't suppose they'll help us — being Dutchmen. But thank the Lord there are a couple of boat-hooks in the boat that we can hitch on to his rail if he won't throw us a rope, and we must make shift to go hand over fist up those. You're all steamer sailors, and you don't know how to climb; but if any man doesn't learn enough for this occasion, he'll have me to deal with afterward, and I don't recommend the experience. Once on board, if there's any argument, you're to attend to officers only. If one of you pulls a knife, I'll throw him overboard. This scrap is to be gone through English fashion, if scrap there is to be.

There's to be no killing. But if they show ugly, you may hammer them as hard as you like. And remember also, nobody's to tackle the Old Man. He's my meat. And you needn't worry about deck-hands. Go for the officers — if there's trouble — bowl them over, lash them up, and throw them into the chart house. Savvy all that, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Yes, sir, and what afterward?"

"That I'll attend to, and let you know my wishes in due time."

The *Rhein,* with stopped propeller, lay rolling in the dark blue troughs, and the white life-boat, magnificently handled, raced down to her, close-hauled to a spanking breeze. Half a dozen fathoms short of the steamer's lee, Mr. Kettle smartly rounded-to, let drop his lug-sail and jib. He sheered up alongside, and the crew fended off cannily with oar looms, so that the steamer should not crush them with her downward roll.

But though men stood at the rail that swooped and soared above them, the hospitable rope of invitation was not thrown — as Mr. Kettle had anticipated. So he gave sharp orders, and at the next downward roll two boat-hooks were suddenly upended and hooked to her rail; and gripping these with their hands, Mr. Kettle and Jenkins walked up the *Rhein's* rusty black side, and over the barrier above.

The Germans, it is true, had not invited them; but throwing men back into their boat to starve to death, once they had made their way on board, was another

matter; and so, though the life-boat's crew stepped inboard over the rail without help, they did it also without interference.

Mr. Kettle rounded up his men with their backs against a deck-house. "Mr. Jenkins," said he, "I leave you in charge. I'm going topside to interview the Old Man on a matter of business. I'm quite competent to tackle the crowd on the bridge, but if these ducks down here feel called upon to interfere, I'd be obliged if you'd keep them amused."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The little mate turned and stepped lightly up the ladder to the upper bridge.

The big square-shouldered German captain met him. "You come on to my bridge unasked," he roared. "Are these your English manners?"

"Yes," said Kettle cheerfully, "and I've come here specially to teach you more of them, you glass-eyed Dutchman." On which he seized the big German's beard in his iron fist, and jerked it to this side and to that till the unfortunate owner felt that his head was being wrenched adrift from its moorings. And then, when he had his man half-dazed, and before the other two officers and the quartermaster on the bridge had recovered sufficiently from their astonishment at the sudden attack to offer assistance, he swung his victim round, and using him as a battering-ram, drove the others before him till he had cleared the bridge and had the captain to himself.

"And now," said he, "we have room for a little,

quiet, thoughtful talk. What do you suppose I was sitting out in that boat for in the middle of the Sargasso Sea? Good of my health?"

The German captain felt his head gingerly to make sure it was still in its socket, and murmured something about owners insisting on no breakage of passage.

"Quite so. They're Dutch owners with no manners. You mustn't be guided by them. I left my steamboat two and a half degrees north of this in a state of some distress. Our chief has gone luny and had figured short on coal. So I've come down here to find enough to fill the deficiency."

"You have come for —? I do not understand."

"Coal," I said. "I take it you've enough to see you to Tampico and back to happy sausage-land?"

"Vera Cruz is my port. I carry enough coal to steam from there to N'York. No more."

"It will be plenty. You can come with me and deliver up enough to see us home, and we'll leave you the change. You can run into Tampico and re-bunker from the coal shoots down-river there, before you turn her nose for Vera Cruz harbor walls."

"But"— the big German spread the palms of expostulation —"but I am not a collier ship. I do not wish to sell coal."

"If you don't sell, it will be taken from you. You are going to part with it, anyway."

"I can not think you mean this. What you propose is piracy on the high seas, no less."

"Put it in poetry and set it to music, if you think that will ease you. But your coal my steamboat is going to have. I don't know that the point interests me very much, but for the sake of formality and for entering in the log, I'd like to hear if you'll give it up on reasonable terms."

The German captain was cowed, maltreated, shaken, but he found his backbone here.

"You may kill me if you like, and I suppose you will. But it shall never be said that of free will I betrayed the trust my owner has given me. My honor is all that I have left, and I will keep that."

"Kill you?" said the little mate contemptuously. "What's your value as cold meat to me? You're no use as fuel now, though I daresay you'll be used as that in the sweet by and by. Coal's what I'm after, and the side issues have been brought in by your lack of manners."

He made a sudden dive, and produced a revolver from the after part of the German's clothing. "H'm, I thought so. A man who speaks his English with a Massachusetts accent like yours is bound to carry a gun to match. And yet, lord! you hadn't savvy enough to pull it! You're an amazing back number. Well, I guess you'll have to camp out in your own chart house till I give further orders. Don't you dare to answer me. And if you try any trick I'll pluck your beard clean out by the roots next time. Now, quick march! *Vorwarts!*"

Only once did the German attempt further expos-

tulation. But when he turned he looked down the black barrel of his own revolver, and the sight cowed him finally. He suffered himself to be hustled into his chart house, and there collapsed on the settee.

To him were driven under varying circumstances of indignity his three mates and chief engineer, and Jenkins, with another filched revolver, stood guard over the door.

"And now," said Mr. Kettle, addressing the rest of the crew within reach, "does any one dispute that owing to the lamentable defection and incapability of other officers, I am in full command of this junk?"

There was no answer.

"Carried," said Mr. Kettle. "Very good, then. I don't allow my decks to be used as an *alameda.* Watch below, get below. Mr. Jenkins, you're mate. Get hold of your deck-hands on duty, and set them to washing this filthy paint. I like a clean ship. You, quartermaster, my compliments to the second engineer, and I'd be glad if he'd come and report to me how long it will be before he can have the ship under way again."

Some men are born to command, and Mr. Owen Kettle, the Mate of the *Norman Towers,* was one of them. He had the knack of the words, and nature and practice had given him the clear, crisp, carrying voice in which to deliver them. Men instinctively jumped to carry out orders when he gave them.

Miss Violet Chesterman, who came from a military

stock herself, noticed this with keen appreciation. So much depends on the timbre of a voice.

Miss Chesterman, it chanced, had been the first of all on board the *Rhein* to see the life-boat. She had been sitting under the shade of an awning reading a novel, which (luckily for Kettle) bored her. She had looked up, and there, on the edge of the blue desert of sea, spied the boat. She shaded her eyes, and saw men in it waving frantically. What woman would not have been thrilled?

She had jumped to her feet and run to the bridge ladder and given her alarm. Captain Engelberg, in his most stiff and pompous manner, had intimated that he intended to conduct the affairs of his ship without the unasked-for assistance of passengers. And then, when she saw that no attempt was going to be made to pick up the life-boat, she had taken steps to have the passage of the *Rhein* rudely interrupted.

All this, of course, Mr. Kettle did not know. But his eyes told him that the lady in white muslin who came up from aft, was extremely good-looking, and he returned her greeting with cordiality, and mentioned his surprise at finding an Englishwoman on a German tramp cargo boat.

The lady shrugged. "I had my reasons." And then she laughed. "But I'll freely own that I didn't travel by the *Rhein* for comfort. To be frank with you, I've found both the ship and her German officers more detestable than I imagined could be possible. I heard Captain Engelberg call you a pirate just now."

She laughed again. "I don't know if you are that, or what you are, but anyway, I'm sure your régime will be an improvement."

"Your comfort, miss, will be a thing that I shall look after most narrowly. You give me word the first time a steward neglects you or your room, or the cook doesn't dish up to your taste, and then you stand by to see me make that man hop. As regards being a pirate, there are extenuating circumstances about the way I had to come aboard here which even a stipendiary magistrate couldn't overlook, and anyway, as chief officer of the *Norman Towers* I have to bring back coal to my own captain, let the opposition be what it may. As regards personal matters, I've pretty well squared them up already, except that I've still got to attend to that man who stood beside you near the poop staff and mocked at my boat when she was being left behind. You must understand, miss, that I don't allow any man living to laugh at me."

"But I'm not a man. So you will let me laugh, won't you? Your mistake is so funny. If it wasn't for the man you're speaking of you wouldn't be on board here at all, and the *Rhein* would be some considerable number of miles farther along her way."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Well, he is a Scot — a Mr. McTodd, and he and I are the only non-Germans on board. I'm afraid we are neither of us popular, but I gather he is pretty actively disliked. You see, he's in the stoke-hold, and

(according to his own account), he undertook to teach the ship's company boxing."

"H'm," said Mr. Kettle, bristling. "Fancies himself with his hands, does he? And the engine-room officers didn't know how to keep discipline? It was about time I came to teach them."

"You might take into account the small item that in all probability he saved your life," the lady suggested. "I'm afraid I'm no engineer, but perhaps you can tell me if there is a thing called a 'thrust'?"

"Thrust blocks, yes, miss."

"Well, Mr. McTodd left me with designs that were connected with the thrust, and a shovel full of ashes, and 'nutting her up tight'. Frankly, the technicalities were quite beyond me, and very likely I've reported them inaccurately. Also there are moments when McTodd's best Pollockshields accent is completely outside my grasp."

"Speaks as if he had no roof to his mouth?"

"Precisely. And so beyond the fact that his scheme was calculated to give pain to the engineer staff, and to bring the machinery to a standstill, I'm afraid I can't describe it."

"He seems to have delivered the goods all right," said the little sailor dryly. "And I shouldn't like you to go away and think your description was a bad one, miss. But for a subordinate to tamper with the ship's engines is a very serious offense against professional etiquette."

"At any rate you should be the last to complain."

"I trust, miss, that I shall always have the strength to do what I consider right, whether it's to my own advantage or the reverse. I must ask you to excuse me for a moment. I take it that this man with the black eye and the fat lip is the second engineer that I sent for, and I've got to hear his report."

The *Rhein's* second engineer had come on deck with no inclination to recognize the authority of the invader, and his introductory sentences were not those of urbanity. Mr. Kettle did not interrupt. He merely looked at him, and by quick degrees civility oozed into the man's discourse.

He spoke in technicalities of a smell of heated iron, a frenzied search, a bearing that threatened to seize. Nothing but an instant stoppage of the main engines saved the *Rhein* from a broken shaft. Some malefactor had done the thing. Search was made for him. He was found. A court (according to precedent) was assembled for his trial, and evidence was taken down at length in writing.

"Instead of getting your old coffee-mill mended up and running again."

"I did as my chief ordered. He acted according to routine."

"I see. Dutch routine. Well, Mr. Ehrenbreitstein, what I want to know here and now is, how long is it going to take you to get under way again? You may clap on all the hands you need or can use."

"I could not guarantee to have the engines turning again in less than twenty-four hours."

A voice from behind interrupted. "Vara true. Twenty-four hours is short allowance, too, for the Dutchies. The job would take even me a good two hours, and I'm a mechanic, with a fine record in the Clydebank shops at my tail."

The little sailor turned sharply and looked upward. The upper part of a large grimy man projected through the fiddley gratings above. He had a tousled head, and a cut over his left eye which at intervals he mopped with a handful of discolored cotton-waste.

"Are you McTodd?"

"I was when I signed on. But on account of sheer professional abeelity I've been promoted fourth engineer on this junk, so ye'll kindly clap on the mister when you address me."

"Then it was you that tampered with the engines?" asked the little sailor sourly.

"Just me. It was a most unprofessional thing to do (as I've no doubt your tongue is itching to tell me), but I had ma' reasons."

"If you wish me to thank you for saving my life I do it, here and now."

"Man, you may consairve your breath and spare ma' blushes. I take it ye're just a sailor man that's paid to be drowned, and not having at that time the pleasure of your fascinating acquaintance, I'm free to tell you I didn't care the value of a bawbee whether ye sank or swam. When I tampered with yon thrust, I did it to oblige the leddy. She seemed anxious to give you the chance of treading a dry deck."

Miss Chesterman was quick to see the antagonism that had sprouted up between the two, and made skilful intervention. "I was going to ask if Captain Kettle would come and have a cup of tea with me, as I know Mr. McTodd wishes to get on with his repairs."

The little sailor's red face deepened in hue, till it became almost purple. Like most mates, he had held a master's certificate for long enough, but this was the first time any one had given him the title.

Mr. McTodd from above winked a shrewd eye. "Miss," said he, "you've diplomacy, and the next time you find yourself in a vice-consul's office, you may tell them I said so. It's a fine gift. But deal gently with the young man. Well, I'll go below to pour oil into the wounds of yon thrust. I wish I'd the wine which we're told the guid Samaritan also carried in his first-aid kit. It's vara exhausting to work in the heat of this engine-room without lubricant. And the mess room's dry. I hadn't been promoted there three days from the fireman's fo'castle when supplies ran oot."

"If you will let me, I will send the cabin steward down with a tray."

"Say no more, m'em. I'll treasure your memory."

Miss Chesterman's cup of tea developed itself into a tidy meal, and Kettle faced it with the appetite that is only grown after starvation in an open boat. A table was brought out on deck, and an abject steward waited on him with twittering knees.

CHAPTER V

THE DUTCHMAN PAYS

THE *Rhein* ran briskly alongside the *Norman Towers,* turned her engines to full speed astern, and came to a dead stop some twenty fathoms away. It was very smartly done.

Mr. O. Kettle, from the upper bridge of the *Rhein,* looked across at his own ship and frowned. Her side was rust-streaked and shabby; her bottom, when she heaved up to the long blue swell of the Sargasso Sea, showed a grass-green garden of weed; her rigging and funnel stays were ill set up; and her decks were cluttered with untidy litter. A derrick boom which had jumped out of its chock traversed about the fore-deck as she rolled, and scored a bright arc on the iron plating between bulwark and hatch.

From the fore shrouds there blew out the remaining third of a wind-ragged Union Jack which had been seized there, Union down, as a permanent sign of calamity. Even the falls of the port life-boat had not been touched since Mr. Kettle unhooked from them, and the blocks, with a catch of orange-yellow Gulf weed streaming from them, soused in the water or bumped against the plating as the steamer rolled.

Mr. Kettle summed up the situation. "Old Man

standing by the whisky bottle. Others too slack to carry on without orders."

He glanced round rather nervously at Miss Chesterman who (by special invitation) was on the upper bridge at his side. He obviously expected comment, and with the nervousness of a man who sees the infelicities of his own fireside exposed to a stranger, dreaded it.

She skirted the subject tactfully. "How delighted your friends will be to see you back."

"Bringing coal?"

"If you like to put it that way. But come to think of it, isn't it natural one should always admire success? You set out on a forlorn hope and you've succeeded. What could be more satisfactory?"

Miss Chesterman was tall and generously proportioned. She was all that one means by the description "a fine handsome woman", and like many girls of her build, she was frankly and openly attracted by a man half a head shorter than herself. In fact, during the four days in which the *Rhein* hunted for the disabled *Norman Towers* she had worked up between herself and the little sailor something that might be described as a hot flirtation.

But at this moment on the upper bridge of his captured steamboat, Mr. Kettle was a ship's officer and nothing beyond. In reply to the whistle-hoot a dozen apathetic figures appeared on the *Norman Towers'* untidy decks, but there was no Captain Farnish, and no trace of organized discipline, and for a moment

Mr. Kettle gritted his teeth in a spasm of rage at the spectacle.

"Miss," he said, turning to the lady, "what you see there is entirely my fault. Captain Farnish suffers from malaria, and I guess he's down with a bad attack. He deliberately signed on inferior mates and engineers, as he did me the honor to intrust the discipline of the boat to his chief officer, and that's me. When my back's turned, you see what happens. When I get back on board there, you'll see discipline come back like a conjuring trick."

He hailed across, addressing the second and third mates by name, and demanding a boat, but none was forthcoming. Apathy had bitten into that crew too deeply, and finally it was in the *Rhein's* quarter-boat, rowed by the negro and the German, and escorted by a shoal of excited flying-fish that he passed across to his own ship.

By way of emphasizing his home-coming he knocked down the first three men who stood in his path, and then marched briskly into the chart house. Captain Farnish, with the usual tear in his eye, sat huddled in his red velvet chair, and Mr. Kettle noted with fresh distaste that the caster of the lame leg was still absent.

"Come back on board, sir. I've brought that coal."

"Very pleased to see you, Mr. Kettle, me man. But I don't think coal interests me now. My professional reputation's eternally punctured; 'n all on

account of that psalm-singing Mr. Little. Never you take up psalm-singing, Mr. Kettle, me man, or if you do, take dam' good care to pick out the right psalms."

"I'll remember that, sir. But I'd like to point out that whatever else the owners may be, at any rate they're business men. It isn't as if the old *Towers* was fully insured. They stand to lose twenty-five per cent. if she's a total loss, and to pay according on salvage. Now you've saved them that."

Captain Farnish shook a blowsy head.

"Think that Dutch boat won't put in a big claim for salvage?"

"She might," said the chief officer dryly, "if anybody aboard her knew our name. But you see, I've every soul of her people under hatches, and there, if you'll give me my way, sir, they'll stay till we've got the coal we want and are away out of sight."

"But your own boat's crew — won't they tell the Dutch skipper if he asks?"

"Well, there are two reasons against that, sir. First, the *Rhein* didn't treat us very civilly, and my men were mad enough to eat her, funnel and all, by the time we did get on board. And, secondly, I had the handling of these men for a considerable number of days in our life-boat, sir, and I can guarantee that — with *me* in command of them — they're the best disciplined handful of toughs in the Western Ocean to-day."

"I can believe it. You have a knack with you in

handling a crew, Mr. Kettle, me man. Must have got it from me, I suppose. My whiskers! but I was a fine bucko mate in my day before I got command, and had to take so many precautions against malaria. But it would have to come out sooner or later who we are. We can't take the Dutchman's coal without paying for it. That's blame' near piracy."

"Beg your pardon, sir, but I wasn't proposing anything of the sort. You've money in that drawer next to the chronometer, in hard cash. I suppose there's some one among those incompetents down in the engine-room who can figure out how many tons it will take to steam us home, and we will pay the *Rhein* at Newport rates plus five shillings a ton added for the emergency call. You can take it from me, sir, the subject will then drop. That Dutch skipper (although I can not like his eye-glasses or the cut of his beard) is a man with a pride of his own, and you'll never find him going to a consulate and squalling that his whole ship has been held up by a boatload of starving scarecrows that he tried to desert in mid-ocean. No, sir, there's human nature even among Dutchmen, and the man'll hold his tongue."

"Splendid thing, human nature," Captain Farnish assented, "though I still feel my position is precarious. I mean, very risky thing to depend on glass-eyed Dutchmen possessing human nature. Eh, well, as you've come back, Owen, me man, I can hand over charge to you with full, I may say fullest, confidence. Strain of your absence has been so very great, I really

must indulge in half an hour's sleep." And murmuring, "Never get married, Mr. Kettle, me man. Strain of keeping subsequent family out of workhouse most exhausting," Captain Farnish broke off into a most enjoyable snore.

The little mate frowned. He took a book from the shelf above the wash-stand and fitted it under the casterless leg of the red velvet chair when it lurched upward to the roll of the ship, and then pressed on the bell-push till the captain's steward came.

"My man," said the mate, "I've come back on board this packet, and don't you forget it. Next time you fail to answer a bell promptly I'll give you a dose of smartening powder that will take a week to digest. Now turn-to and clean out that big starboard stateroom below, and make up a bed in the lower bunk. If I find a speck of dirt when I come to inspect, I'll make you wash the whole place out with your tongue. It is probable that a lady passenger will travel in that room, and if I hear so much as a word of complaint from her, I'll attend to you in a way that'll make you hate the sea for the remainder of your natural life."

Mr. Kettle went out on deck then, sent certain messages, and presently was holding a meeting of the second and third mates and the second and third engineers in the saloon below. Proceedings were entirely private, and no report of them official or unofficial was ever issued, which goes to show that whatever differences officers of the mercantile marine may have among themselves, it is a point of strictest

etiquette with them to keep these away from outsiders.

It was, however, matter of common note that after the meeting broke up, the second mate (who hated responsibility) had a puffed and darkened left eye which showed signs of rapidly closing; that the third's collar was burst at both ends; and that both the second and third engineers, young men who were always sallow, were both so white as to suggest that anger and insult burned hotly within them. But the next thing noticeable about the quartette was their briskness. They had gone into that meeting limp and dispirited. They emerged angry but energetic. And, incidentally, the record also tells that Mr. Kettle had contrived to break both sets of his own knuckles.

Affairs marched rapidly from now onward. The infection of briskness spread. The lethargic crew woke up — or were rudely awakened. A boatload of them went across to the *Rhein,* and to their surprise found themselves under the crisp command of a truculent officer in whom they recognized one Jenkins, ex-incompetent deck-hand of the *Norman Towers.*

But Mr. Jenkins soon proved himself an officer of affairs. He yapped out orders with the true bucko mate's bark. Derricks were lifted and winches rigged to raise the coal from below, bags were found to carry it in; tarpaulins were stripped and hatches removed; and lo! at the bottom of the hold, among the coal, there stood ready the Scots engineer McTodd facing (after the manner of a drill sergeant), a squad of

German firemen and trimmers who carried their shovels before them stiffly at the salute.

"Yap — yap — yap," barked Jenkins, and the work was carried out at the run. A towing hawser was passed, and the *Rhein* steamed ahead to keep it taut. Then with the distance constant between the two vessels, a Temporley transporter was rigged. A wire was stretched from the *Rhein's* maintop to the *Norman Towers'* foretop, and on this traveled the usual mechanism of sheaves and blocks. Mr. Jenkins stood beside the *Rhein's* poop staff and threw up a hand to signify that all was ready at his end. Mr. Kettle, on the forecastle head of the *Norman Towers,* gave a similar arm signal for "Go ahead."

Coal from below was loaded into bags, whipped on deck, slung aloft, and sent dancing out above the dipping towing hawser. The bags were dumped on the *Norman Towers'* fore-deck, and their contents were emptied into the hungry bunkers. The steamers rolled crisscross to the swells in a halo of coal dust, and work was pushed forward at a pace that nearly satisfied even that master of the art of driving, Mr. Owen Kettle.

All helped except Captain Farnish, who attended to his malaria; the *Rhein's* officers and crew, who were battened down in the *Rhein's* number one hold, and raged together there furiously; and Miss Violet Chesterman, who sat in the captain's own Madeira chair on the *Rhein's* upper bridge and watched proceedings with absorbed interest.

Miss Violet Chesterman was a young lady of some considerable experience of life. Her years numbered only twenty-three but she had lived every minute of them. She had gone through seasons in London, New York, and Paris; she had lived in a Swiss mountain hotel in winter, and in a salmon fisher's log-house in Norway; she had yachted, bicycled, danced, golfed; she knew the delights of winter cock-shooting in the West of Ireland, and the gorgeous boredom of court functions in London. She had money and a fascinating manner, and knew the thrills of many proposals; and, a month before the date on which this chronicle opens, found herself formally engaged to be married.

I will not give away the adventurous man's name, as he is husband now of a far more suitable young woman, and I do not wish to disturb them. But I may say that he was a peer who played a good game of polo, owned three very fine houses, and had foreseen English predatory legislation so cleverly that he had practically all his capital invested beyond the reach of socialistic theft. Personally, I have always found him amusing, and so presumably did Miss Chesterman till she became engaged to him. But after that they apparently bored one another to the verge of tears. He, being a gentleman, played the engaged man's game down to the last comma; but she, towards the end of that month, became acutely miserable.

An uncle saved the situation. He was fishing for tarpon and catching sharks in the Pánuco River at

Tampico, and he wrote her a half-joking invitation to come out and amuse her aunt. She cabled a frantic "Yes," rushed down to Southampton just in time to see the *North German Lloyd* boat put to sea, and within an hour had engaged a passage on the German tramp s.s. *Rhein,* then on the point of departure for Gulf ports with coal and general cargo.

From the safe harborage of the *Rhein's* stuffy saloon in Southampton Water, she wrote the friendliest possible letter breaking off her engagement, and when this had been sent ashore by the pilot, set herself to study the manners and customs of that unknown animal, the German merchant seaman.

For a week Miss Chesterman found her new associates interesting. She marveled three times daily at the amount of knife-blade they could swallow at meals without cutting themselves; their martial bearing, their bows, and their taste for sentiment were all frankly amusing; but at the end of that week these things grew stale, and a general feeling of fastidious disgust filled her to the brim. (Those unfortunates who have met the German mariner at home on the high seas will be able to supply the details.)

There are moments when she thought she might have done worse than close with the offer so recently rejected. And she was in this frame of mind when she encountered Romance in the largest of capitals and (as she believed) for the first time in her life, in the person of Mr. Owen Kettle.

You are to imagine her leaning over the poop rail

of the *Rhein,* and watching the battered life-boat, that she herself had sighted, being callously left astern to perish in the desert of the sea. Any man or woman living, it would seem, would have been thrilled by the sight of that little ship's officer sitting there undaunted among his lean scarecrow crew with nothing else in sight but blue sky, blue Sargasso Sea, and orange-yellow weed.

It had been a shock to her to find that the engineer took the whole as a matter of ordinary German routine. "German ship-owners were in business to make dividends, not to waste time over saving the lives of competitors," was the view that Mr. McTodd took. And then she had turned her eloquence on the Scot, and had seen that acid Northerner thaw out and deliberately risk the safety of the ship to do her pleasure.

Romance! She drew deep breaths as she thought of it. These were deeper waters than those she had known before, and as for the men that trafficked in them — well, at any rate they were men.

And then she had seen this Mr. Kettle, with nothing much else besides his bare hands and his personality, take possession of a big, well-found, strongly-manned steamer, and carry her off to do his pleasure in the teeth of all opposition. The man was something quite new to her, something full to the brim with primeval vigor. No wonder she fell in love with him. . . .

The coaling went on with noise, and dust, and orderly speed. The steamers rolled crisscross, but the *Rhein's* engines kept the lines taut and the bunches of coal bags went hopping merrily across from lower masthead to lower masthead to the boundless amazement of the flying-fish. It is a nice operation, this coaling at sea, and none of the crew of the *Norman Towers* had ever witnessed it before. They were interested at first, and heartily sick of it before it was finished, but it was astonishing to note that no one complained of tiredness.

When Mr. Kettle returned on board they were one and all sunk in a slough of lethargy, and the process of waking up under his hard driving was painful to many of them. But the small mate was perfectly callous to their inclinations toward laziness, and even that chartered idler, the carpenter, was seen to carry out an order on the run when Mr. Kettle's trim shoe toe threatened him from the rear.

But at last the hungry bunkers were stored with sufficient fuel to steam the *Norman Towers* back to Liverpool, and crisp orders were given to knock off, and unrig the transporter.

In the meanwhile fires had been lighted under the cold boilers, and smoke trickled from the rusty stack. The escort of sea-gulls recognized the omens and rose mewing from the water, ready to fly on with labored wing to that spot in mid-ocean where the gulls from the Azores would take over the watch. The *Norman*

Towers' boat returned from the *Rhein,* bringing her people, bringing also, as Mr. Kettle noted with a queer thrill, Miss Violet Chesterman.

Tentatively he had offered the lady an alternative to the discomforts of the German boat, and (as we have seen), had ordered a state-room for her in case she came. But it was not till she had seen him bring back energy and discipline to his old crew that she made up her mind to take the step which (as she was well aware), would probably cut her off from her own caste for the remainder of her life.

The German officers and crew still remained battened down in their own Number One hold, and the sole remaining occupant of the *Rhein's* outer decks was the Scots engineer. Him, Mr. Kettle, the Mate, hailed.

"You there, Mr. McTodd? Won't you come back in our boat? Captain Farnish would be very pleased to give you a passage back to Liverpool."

"I thank ye. But I'll stay where I've signed on."

"But, man, they'll eat you when you let them out of that hold."

"Man," bawled the Scot, wagging a discolored forefinger across the dark blue swells, "yon's a very humorous observe. It's just for the fun of seeing them try that I'm staying on. If ever you're down at Clydebank two months hence, ask for me there and you'll hear news of how these Dutchmen fancied their meal."

Miss Violet Chesterman drew a deep breath as she listened. This manner of men was new to her experience. They might be many things, but at any rate she decided they were men.

CHAPTER VI

LEADS UP TO MISS DUBBS

CAPTAIN FARNISH'S appearance at sea has already been lightly described by the word "blowsy." Once out of soundings, he lived a life of slippered, unbuttoned, unshaven ease, complicated with (as has been hinted frequently), systematic attempts to keep away symptoms of malaria. But, once he had given orders to fly for a pilot, he bathed, he did mighty surgical deeds with a razor, and his steward was hugely busy over brushing the mold from boots and wearing-apparel.

There was nothing of the popular idea of the mariner in Captain Farnish's shore rig. He wore a black tail-coat and austere trousers; his waistcoat was cut low (as if to show the edges of his economical shirt-front), and displayed a fine gold stud and a pious black bow tie; and after he had taken his false teeth from the drawer in the chart table where they traveled when at sea, and clicked them in between his lips, he would have passed comfortably for a well-to-do grocer with strong Nonconformist tendencies.

He practised a smile or two at himself in the looking-glass to make sure his teeth were working correctly, shipped the square-topped bowler hat which

the steward reverently handed him, and went out on deck.

"Mr. Kettle, me man."

"Sir?"

"Good old smell, the Liverpool River, isn't it? Not an ounce of fever in a mile of it. Er — if you want to slip ashore before we dock, that'll be all right."

"I trust you'll allow me to take the fore-deck as usual, sir."

"If you choose to remain on board," said Captain Farnish dryly, "I should say a boatswain's chair in a ventilator would be the healthiest spot for you. Just remember, me man, that that blame' Dutchman has had a week ashore at Tampico by this, and if he hasn't been making the cables hum, I'll swallow my ivories. It isn't as if we were in New York, where they always back their own side. You're in good old England now, Owen, me man, where, when a case comes on in the courts, the stipendiary and the papers always say the Englishman's wrong."

"You think it'll be a case of the police, sir?"

"I'm pretty sure of it."

"Ah!" said Mr. Kettle, the Mate, thoughtfully.

"Yes, I quite see what you're considering. Your idea is that you've done nothing to be ashamed of, and that when the police come you'll put up a fight that half Liverpool would pay sixpence a head to come and stare at. Well, in ordinary circumstances I'd be the last man to try and head you off — you

having right on your side, as we're agreed. But I want you to remember that you've got somebody else to consider now, and that's this Miss Chesterman you've been sparking so hard. I'll own up at once she's not my clip, but then I know quite well I'm the old style of shellback and you're the new. You like to sport a brass-edged uniform whether you're on shore or sea, and dam' well you look in it, me man. That ginger-colored torpedo beard sets you off well, too — makes you look a kind of breezy fellow that'd go anywhere to find a bit of trouble. And I don't see why you shouldn't marry the girl either. She should have money, by her accent; and, if you've sense, you'll cut the sea, and find an occupation ashore. If I were you, I'd go into the corn business. There's said to be money in it, and it's certainly genteel, if only you're in it in a big enough way."

"If ever I marry, I do not leave the sea. There'll be no question about that."

"You're young, and you've none depending on you. Wait till the kiddies begin to arrive, and then you'll wish you'd a nice quiet hen farm and a balance in the savings-bank."

Now Mr. Kettle, the Mate, had himself thought this matter out very thoroughly already. Like most officers of the mercantile marine, he was quite ready to stand up to all that came from either man or the elements on the face of the waters, but he had an instinctive dread and distrust for English law ashore.

The law (according to his view), was always on the

side of the owner or the crew, and any officer who was dragged into court was disbelieved and insulted, and emerged from the ordeal with his certificate suspended or indorsed, and his future professional prospects eternally blasted.

Of course, too, if Captain Farnish appeared before a stipendiary magistrate or a Board of Trade inquiry, that disgusting mode of torture known as a cross-examination would inevitably bring to light items of his past history — connected with avoidance of malaria, for instance — and cause him to lose his present billet, and inevitably debar him from ever getting another. There is small demand these days for elderly shipmasters — none at all if they are known to have their failings.

Whether the German complained or not, the *Norman Towers* was long overdue, and underwriters would most certainly press for an inquiry even if owners were inclined to hush matters up. Somebody would have to be sacrificed.

If Little, the chief engineer, had only been kind enough to die on the passage home, blame might very well have been piled on his absent shoulders. But Mr. Little had recovered. He had not only sloughed off his madness, but had turned very shrewd and sane, and (somewhat naturally), was prepared to fight tooth and nail for the retention of his own chief's certificate.

"Say a word against me," said Mr. Little, "and I'll swear an affidavit I told the Old Man in Vera Cruz we'd only coal enough to carry us to mid-ocean, and

he was too blind to care. Yes, and I can bring witnesses to prove it. You can bet the hands hate the mate enough to swear to anything he dislikes, after the way he's driven them."

Mr. Kettle recognized the soundness of the argument. There remained then the alternative of professional ruin for either Captain Farnish or himself, and what his superior officer expected of him was clear enough.

". . . If you want to slip ashore before we dock, that'll be all right. . . ."

It was frankly selfish, of course, but then, after all, self-preservation is the first law of mercantile marine officers (as it is of nature), especially if the officers are married and have families and no means. As a clenching argument, Mrs. Farnish's last words to Mr. Kettle as he left the home where he had been brought up, leaped back to his memory:

"Owen, boy, you'll look after my old man."

Of course, there was Miss Chesterman. Once professional ruin overtook him, he was quite of opinion that his little romance with her would come to an undignified end. She was certainly very much in love with him at that period, and though he tried to persuade himself that he was in love with her, I do not think that his feeling ever amounted to that. He was a good deal dazzled by her charm, and he was certainly flattered by her preference, and (in his turn) imagined that she was attracted by his rapid rise in his own profession, and the prospect that he would,

with luck, be presently standing on the upper bridge of a steamer as full-fledged shipmaster. Mr. Kettle, the Mate, had a full idea of the importance of the Captain Kettle that was to be in the future.

So, if he made himself scapegoat, it must be an understood thing that all his pretensions to the hand of Miss Violet Chesterman must vanish at once. And all (his demon suggested to him) for the sake of an injunction laid on him by that uninteresting old woman, Mrs. Saturday Farnish. Mr. Kettle laughed grimly to himself: "The old dear has it easily, of course."

Thereafter he made rapid preparations. His clothes, and the poor contents of his room, he packed into a tin trunk and an antique portmanteau, and addressed care of Mrs. S. Farnish at an unfashionable terrace in Birkenhead. He strapped on a money belt, and in it stowed the bulk of his capital, namely, three pound ten in gold, distributing what remained of sixteen and twopence in his waistcoat pockets; he slipped the German captain's revolver — that *spolia opima* — into a back pocket, where it nestled very kindly — and, after an effort in arithmetic, he inclosed nine and sixpence in an envelope addressed to the chief steward in payment of his beer and tobacco account for the voyage.

His method of getting into a shore boat was masterly in its simplicity. He went into the wheel engine-house, waited his opportunity, and then clapped a heavy spanner in between the helical cogs of the drive.

The sturdy little engines hiccoughed and stopped, and the helm (which was hard over at the time) caused the *Norman Towers* to make a most alarming sheer across the fairway.

On the upper bridge the Point Lynas pilot in a panic rang his main engines to "full speed astern", and the *Norman Towers* shivered and lurched herself to a sudden standstill in the middle of a lakelet of muddy foam. To her shot up a small open boat, under lug-sail and jib, attracted by an arm wave from the mate. The two shabby men in her looked up keenly.

Mr. Kettle, the Mate, with a rope in his hand, clapped his feet against the ship's side, and ran down it nimbly to the boat, jumping on to her gunwale exactly as she rounded up alongside.

"You're nippy," said the shabby man at the tiller as he shot the boat into the wind.

"I am. Now, away with you ashore, my lad, and drop me at the nearest telegraph office."

"Got the price of your passage on you?"

"You can put it down to the firm. I guess it's for their benefit I hailed you."

"Seems to me there's trouble on board. The old junk don't steer. There's the Old Man on the top deck laying down the time o' day to the pilot, and that bit of skirt on the poop's holdin' out beseechin' arms to some one in this boat that I don't think's me. Mister, by your leave, I'm going to run alongside again to see if the firm ashore will really O.K. your bus fare to that telegraph office, or if there's some one

who'll give a bit more to have you put back on board. Hi, mister, put that down."

Mr. Kettle, armed with a stretcher, was standing up in the boat. Said he: "If either of you two ducks don't carry out my orders exactly as they're given, I'll knock one or both of you overboard, and sail your rotten old tub myself. D'ye hear me?"

"I suppose I do."

"Say, 'sir,' when you're speaking to an officer. D'ye know your course, or shall I set it for you?"

"The ebb's making pretty hard still, but it'll be slack water before we're across"— mumble — mumble —"so I'd better take you on to Foston, sir."

"Why there? It isn't the nearest."

Mr. Kettle noted that the man in the bows looked surprised.

"It's quickest, sir, with this wind and tide. Isn't it, Alfred?"

And Alfred, from the bows, glibly perjured himself, and said they'd be in at Foston telegraph office an hour earlier than they could reach any other.

Mr. Kettle did not believe them but he let it rest at that. After all, his telegram, which was merely a message announcing arrival to Mrs. Farnish, was of no vast importance, and so he set himself to smoking his pipe, and thinking gloomily over the mess he had made of the present, the definiteness with which he had lost Miss Chesterman, and the hash he had made of his future.

"They'll take away my new master's ticket, as

sure as there are pips in little apples," he told himself, "and it's China Seas for mine now, and a pig boat with a coolie crew and a yellow owner."

Night fell on the tawny Mersey, and the ships' lights kindled in the purple gloom and threaded through it at a decorous pace, or swung rhythmically on a station. A wind from the north and east blew chill across the face of the waters, and the outgoing and incoming steam traffic hooted helm signals in forty keys. The cool, damp, muddy river-smell, with its tinge of sewage, came to him like an old friend.

"Rice, chopsticks, and pigtails for mine," Mr. Kettle reminded himself again. "But they say the Chinese girls are fine." And then, thumping the dew-pocked gunwale with a hard fist—"No, I'm blowed if I do," he swore. "The beastly British Board of Trade shan't run me out of my profession, simply because I've done my duty in that state of life to which it pleased the Lord to call me. I'll win out in spite of all their teeth, and command British ships for white owners on the decent seas. And I'll marry—"

At that point, apparently from the parting of its halyards, the lug-sail descended suddenly and enveloped Mr. Kettle in its damp dew-sodden folds. The yard also hit him on the head, and for an instant he was driven below the gunwale level. But it took more than a trifle like that to knock a Western Ocean mate out of time. He was up again on the instant.

"You clumsy swine," he bawled from beneath his covering to the boatmen. "I'll teach you to rig a boat. Clear away this wreck!"

He sat up, and the top of his head under the sail showed as a round dome beneath the moonlight. On it, at the full strength of the steerman's arm, descended the oaken tiller, and Mr. Kettle subsided as a bull does when it is poleaxed.

Said Alfred, the shabby man in the bows, making no effort to move or help: "You've done it now, Arthur. When you signed to me to cut the halyards, I never thought you meant murder."

"Murder be blowed," retorted his friend. "I doubt if I've put him to sleep for an hour. You'll see he'll wake up again in sixty minutes punctual to the clock, and as full of ginger as he can stick. He's a hard case, mate, this one, if ever I saw such a fellow, and he'll carry a skull like a cannon-ball, or he'd have had it fractured long before this. Now we'll just inspect his bank balance. To be true to his type he should carry the bulk of it in a money belt next the meat. Let's inspect. There, didn't I tell you? And I'll just take the liberty of dropping this revolver over into the ditch. I don't fancy myself as a marksman, and if I started any fancy shooting with it I should probably bag my dear old pal, Alfred, instead of the bearded one here. Well, old son, here's thirty bob, and I'll keep the balance as my share, and agent's commission."

"But what are we going to do with him? If we take him ashore he'll lay a complaint."

"Don't you believe it, old son. His nibs here has kicked over the traces; killed a deck-hand, as likely as not, and was shy about going on to Liverpool to meet the police on the pier head. You can bet he didn't switch off and come with us just on account of our looks. And when he steps ashore, the only thing he'll ask for will be to slip quietly away and no questions asked."

Alfred shivered. "I shall be glad enough to see the last of him. He's a tough-looking customer. I hope he'll start to run quick."

"He would if he was let. The trouble for him will be that we've got further use for him."

Alfred was clearly distressed. "I won't be a party to any more games," he babbled.

"Wait till you're invited, old son."

"But what are you up to? It isn't murder? I couldn't stand that. I — I believe I'd inform if you did."

"My brave boy, calm your twittering nerves. The gentleman is far more valuable to us alive than dead. He is going to ship as fireman on a voyage to Valparaiso, and we — or, perhaps, I should say, as you don't seem inclined to chip in — I will draw his advance pay. Twig?"

"But he'll come to before you can get him to Birkenhead or Liverpool, and shipped."

"Again, old son, you undervalue my skill. Permit

me to remind you that once in my shady past I was a doctor (or to be more precise, an unqualified medical student), that being, of course, in the days before you and I met as comedians (as I think we called ourselves) on the music-hall stage, which was before the period when we found it convenient to go foreign in a stoke-hold, which again was before we started picking up a livelihood in this present boat on the Mersey estuary."

"Oh, do get on, and don't drivel."

"As a relic of one of my earlier professions I invariably carry a hypodermic syringe, and a small but carefully selected collection of drugs. Two tubes in the waistcoat pocket contain all the lot. It always jars my nerves to read the rot that ignorant novelists churn out about doping an unwilling hand by putting laudanum in his beer, when probably the beggar has a distaste for beer, and wouldn't drink it at your hands, anyway. Now a little jab from a hypodermic needle, and your patient gets his dose whether he likes it or not; thinks probably that you have lurched up against him by accident, and scratched him with a pin in your waistcoat; and, according to how that little dose is made up, he promptly proceeds to go off to sleep for a given period, or, if you so regulate it, he sleeps on to the end of time. It's neat, it's scientific, and it leaves no blundering traces for the fools of police to read from the outside, or for an interfering analyst to deduce from the contents of the gentleman's tummy."

"You are a devil."

"I'll admit if you like, old son, that I'm a distinct danger to society at present. But if society would combine together to provide me with a thousand a year — and see I didn't overspend it — why, I'd be an ornament to the British Isles, an unobtrusive, club-attending, well-dressed ornament, with strong views about the criminal classes, and a distinct talent for breeding prize fox terriers. Don't try and splice that halyard. Knot it, and turn it end for end."

The shabby man in the bows lifted the prostrate Mr. Kettle to an easier position. "He's as limp as a bit of chewed string. I believe you've killed him. Oh, lord, Arthur, what shall we do next?"

"Make sure our passenger doesn't come to life again with unpleasant suddenness. He's a bit too limp for my taste. Here, I'll just give him a pinch of soothing syrup. . . . Ha! I told you so. Catch hold of him from behind. Hit him over the head with the boat-hook. Well, hold him like that if you like, then, till I get this quieter jammed into his thigh. . . . Phew! Alfred, old son, that was a close call. The man's all steel springs with brass ends to them. He'd got me nearly strangled before I had him quieted off. There'll be a nice quiet stoke-hold somewhere while this little man's being taught to shovel coal."

"Where are you going to put inshore? If he's to be shipped, I suppose Liverpool's best."

"I don't think. Liverpool, say you, and by your own showing you're a nervous man? There are more

toughs in Liverpool than in any other seaport in the British Isles, and in consequence every Liverpool bobby has both eyes sticking about a foot out of his head looking for them. No, Alfred, I don't escort a gentleman with drooping head, who has temporarily lost the use of his lower limbs down Liverpool streets at something past midnight, although he is got up in a uniform that hints he's a seafaring man. Which reminds me the aforesaid uniform is a heap too smart for the poor chap to wake up in and find himself in a stinkin' stokers' fo'c'sle. We must find him something more suitable. Can we draw on your wardrobe, old son?"

"I wish you'd stop your rotting."

"Of course, I'd forgotten. You've only the clothes you at present sit, or, to be more accurate, sprawl in. And I'm in the same box. Of course we did agree, come to think of it, that the troup should travel light this tour. Bit of a dandy, isn't he, our friend, the juggins? I'd like to change duds with him, but I'm afraid his are a bit too smart to dress my present part in; they'd call too much attention from the eyes of beauty, and so on; and as a further argument, they're about half a mile too small for me."

"Well, we can't invent clothes. We shall have to tear and dirty these he's wearing."

"Not on your life. They represent meals for a week, or perhaps drink for a night. Old son, you mustn't get into this way of talking as if you were a millionaire. We shall be ashore in another ten min-

utes now. We'll leave his nibs here as boat-keeper when we've tied her to the wall, and if he's covered up with the lug-sail he'll lie snug and not attract attention, and then we'll toot off to the Mason's Arms, have just one Scotch apiece to wet the luck — they give you a big one for fourpence — and then buy the landlord's old gardening suit for the poor chap that's tumbled into the river and is afraid he's going to have another attack of rheumatism. Not a pal of ours by any means, but if a man doesn't look after his neighbor a bit in this world, who will?"

This program was carried out very much as it was arranged, except for the matter of one drink apiece. The caress of Scotch whisky on his tongue and palate was a thing the less bold of the two rogues never could resist, and numbers two, three, and four followed the opening glass. The silent sullen Alfred grew talkative, and the smart barmaid who sat at the receipt of custom more than once admonished him that that would do.

"'Oh! I'm a pirate bold!'" sang Alfred, "'My shipmates they call me the Grogger; Fine plunder I've got in my hold, That I gathered right out on the Dogger.'— Another glass of the same, please, miss."

"If you don't stop that noise," said the barmaid, "you'll have the landlord in, and I don't recommend him when he's disturbed from his supper."

"Let's have the Scotch, then."

"You've had enough. I'm sure you'd better do as your friend asks, and go out and take a walk."

"Yes, come along, William, old son."

"My name's not William, as you should know perfectly well by this time."

"Miss Dubbs," called a deep and fruity voice from behind the glass door.

"Coming, pa," said the barmaid.

"No, don't come," boomed the voice, "but just tell them rowdies to get out. Tell 'em they're not our class here in the Snug. Tell 'em they'll be better served in our Jug and Bottle, up the yard. Tell 'em they'll enjoy themselves better still at the Colliers' Rest, down the street. Tell 'em I can see their clothes through the glass panel, Miss Dubbs, and 'ear all their low remarks through the woodwork. And tell 'em, Miss Dubbs, that I don't like either."

The barmaid had a sense of humor. She did not retransmit the message. She merely nodded her elaborately dressed head and remarked: "Now you've heard," and obviously looked upon the pair to make their exit.

She was a deep-hipped, full-bosomed, strong-complexioned young woman, quite clearly able to take care of herself, and the shabby Alfred grasped all this in one muzzy glance, and made toward the swing doors. His friend, however, put a hand on his coat tail, and capsized him gently on a bench.

"Now, don't you mind my friend George, miss. He's nothing further to say — have you, old son? There, you see, not a word. He's been suffering a good deal from exposure — and, for that matter, so

have I — and the warmth of your bar and the whisky have made us forget what we came in for. Fact is, there's a fellow outside down in our boat that's been overboard, and got a bad chill. He's T.T., and won't take a drink; so we offered to find him a dry suit of clothes. D'ye think the guv'nor's got such a thing to dispose of?"

"No," said the big bass voice at the other side of the glass door.

"Of course, so far as our means go, we wish to pay. It would be a charity if you could find something. The poor chap's had rheumatic fever once."

Again the big voice made the glasses tingle. "Ma says they can have my old garden clothes for two half-crowns, Miss Dubbs. No, call it three-and-six, and they have to replace the missing buttons themselves."

"Well?" said the barmaid.

"That's a deal," said Arthur, the seedy. "You fetch them, my dear."

"I'm not your dear," said Miss Dubbs pointedly, "and it's not my place to do up-stairs work. Besides, I can't leave the bar." She pulled a bell smartly. "I'll tell the servant to fetch them for you. I think your friend's going out. Perhaps you'd like to go with him."

"I'll sit beside him on that nice comfortable oak bench, and then you'll see he'll be perfectly satisfied. Perhaps, as you've gone so far as to ring that bell for the menial, you'd ask her when she comes to have

a couple of good thick threepenny sandwiches put up for us."

"Sandwiches are fourpence apiece at this house."

"We can eat the extra pennyworth, my dear. Make them so."

The barmaid retired into a novelette, and the clock ticked loudly in lieu of conversation. Alfred at intervals seemed inclined to snore, and when he did his companion shook him viciously, and (as the barmaid, who was quietly watching the pair in the glass at the back of the bar, thought) nervously.

The barmaid was a very healthy unimaginative person with, as befitted her calling, a good deal of experience of mankind, and, as she freely owned afterward, from the moment that the two shabby men had entered the door, she dimly gathered that there was something wrong about them. To start with, she anticipated that they would try to pass bad coin on her, or partake of refreshment and depart suddenly without paying for it. Or, again, they might have come in to steal ash trays or to carry off the brass fire-irons by way of keepsake; and, even when none of these things happened, she was far from comfortable. She was convinced that there was something unwholesome about them.

At last the sandwiches arrived, and huge unsightly hunks they were. The shabby men accepted them without complaint — and paid. The maid also brought the clothes unhandily tied up in a newspaper.

"Here's your three-and-six," said Arthur civilly.

"But don't you want to look them over first?"

"Oh! I guess they'll do," said the shabby man with the refined voice, and roused his shabby companion, and with him went through the door and out into the night.

"Well, I'm blessed," said Miss Dubbs, and then, "Pa," she called through the glass doors, "will you please give an eye to the bar for a bit? I want to go up-stairs."

"Certainly, Miss Dubbs," boomed the big bass voice, and a dapper little man, whose head came up to the level of the barmaid's chin, trotted into the bar parlor at one door as she swept out through the other.

Miss Emily Dubbs went to the coffee-room above, sat herself in the window, and pulled aside a corner of the blind. Outside, in the moonshine, the little strip of tidal harbor showed as clear as day, and across the pavement which led to it walked the two shabby men, arm in arm, with their purple shadows chasing them. When they got to the edge of the quay the one called Arthur sat his friend carefully on a bollard, and, when satisfied that he had acquired a balance there, unpacked the newspaper parcel of clothes, and prepared to descend to a small boat whose position was shown by a mast that projected above the gunwale.

An impish inspiration seized upon Miss Dubbs, and for a moment she laughed, and then she acted upon it. She lifted the sash of the window, and, then drawing the blind still more closely toward the jamb

so that only her mouth was exposed, she called out loudly for "Police," and then again for "Police," and then with a further shrill cry, exclaimed "Murder!"

The effect was sufficiently startling. The shabby man who was sitting, sprang up as though the bollard had suddenly stung him, and ran with ungainly strides up into the little town. The panic was infectious. Arthur, from below, clambered up over the string-piece, called aloud upon the name of his Maker, and followed with precipitate pace. And where they went the present writer neither knows nor cares, but can only point out that from now onward they vanish from the pages of this memoir.

Equally strange to relate, the outcry raised no further disturbance. The houses on the quay remained deaf behind their shutters, and the town policeman (if, indeed, he heard) gave no sign, but, after the manner of his tribe, crunched stolidly along his beat, and did not seek to ram a chivalrous helm into unnecessary disturbance.

Now to begin with, Miss Dubbs was distinctly elated with the success of her alarm. Instinctively she had disliked the two shabby men, but as she had nothing definite against them, her outcry might be described as in the main experimental. The result of it startled her, and as she thought it over more, shook her.

Idly she had cried "Murder!" and the men had run as though the law itself was actually at their heels. She was a big young woman, and tightly incased in

black satin which leaves small space for the more violent emotions, but she caught herself shivering. Had murder been done?

She craned out of the window, and looked up the street, and then she looked down. There was no one to call to aid, no one to consult. For one fleeting instant she thought of the little man with the big voice and the big words down-stairs, and then dismissed the idea with a *poof!* Then she darted across to her own bedroom, hunted out an article of wool work known as a "cloud", fitted it dexterously over her masses of black hair in front of the glass, and then ran nimbly down-stairs and out into the street.

Outside she did not run, because ladies never hurry, although for one thing and another she felt monstrously inclined to do so; but she walked her quickest, and, looking behind, was thankful for the shadow that was kind enough to keep her company; and in the course of forty steps stood upon the string piece of the quay and looked down at an untidy weather-beaten boat below. On the floor of it, partly covered with a blackened sail, was a man. He was lying on his back, and his face was white under the moonshine, and his eyelids were dropped but not fully shut. His red torpedo beard probably accentuated the pallor of his face.

For the moment she thought him dead, and stood there stooping over the boat, fascinated. Then her eye lighted on a ladder of iron rungs leading down from the string piece, and she dropped to her knees

and clambered down into the boat. She was a fine strapping young woman with a good wholesome nerve, and all of the feminine instinct for protection. She was pretty well certain that the man was dead, but she did not shrink from him. She put her hand on his head, discovered on the instant that he lived, and then for the first time felt an impulse to cry out. But she kept this back, sat on one of the boat's thwarts, gathered the man's head on her lap, and spoke to him.

In reply he groaned very, very faintly. She could just hear the sound, and leaned her ear to his lips in case he could form his last wishes into words.

"If you — could kill — that untidy fellow — Arthur — I'd be obliged to you."

"Certainly," was her brisk reply. "But for the present you must get out of this boat and come up to the house. You're near perished to death with cold. Do you think you can climb up if I help you?"

He obviously could not. He had slipped back into unconsciousness again, and her gentle shaking could not rouse him. So with an effort she took him in her arms, and then, standing up, hove him on to the string piece of the quay above; then panting with exertion and excitement, she followed to the upper level herself. And then once more whipping her arms underneath him, she carried him sturdily across the moonlit stones, and through the doorway of the Mason's Arms.

CHAPTER VII

CREMATION OF A TOBACCO-PIPE

"PEOPLE have no idea," said Miss Dubbs, "how careful us bar ladies have to be. People seem to think that because we can be affable with boys that come in for a glass and a chat, we're the same to everybody. I'm not denying, too, that there may be bar girls in some of the smaller establishments who are a bit common. But, in a respectable house such as this, you can bet that a girl knows her place and keeps it, and if she didn't the guv'nor would very soon show her what's what."

"I notice," said Mr. Kettle, "that you call him pa. Any relation?"

"No more'n I am to you. All the village calls him pa, and the old lady ma, for that matter, and as they seem to like it I follow their example. Relation, indeed! I should think not. My people are very different style. I don't tell it to everybody but as you are a sort of friend by now, Captain, I may tell you in confidence that my father's a minister."

"I don't see why you should say a 'sort of' friend. I know that after all you've done for me, I feel that you are about the best friend I've got. But then I suppose —"

"You suppose what?"

"You're accustomed to being kind to people."

"If you mean that I'm in the habit of going out just before quitting time, and picking up drugged young men out of boats and carrying them across here, and putting them into apartments they haven't ordered, you're mistaken."

"Kick me, and you'll find I'll take it lying down."

"Well, I didn't mean to be unkind, Captain, but you must admit that you brought it on yourself. I know you gentlemen think that because a girl's in business behind a bar she can't keep herself select. But you never made a greater mistake in your lives. I'll tell you why. Between customers, during the slack times of the day, we have time for reading, and so, naturally, we pick up a lot that other business ladies don't have a chance of learning. Look at this novel by Charles Garvice! Now what that man doesn't know about life in the higher circles is obviously not worth knowing."

"Which was your father's denomination?"

"Methodist New Connection."

"Mrs. Farnish, who brought me up, was a Bible Christian. Captain Farnish, after some voyages was a strict Wesleyan, and after others he was a Plymouth Brother. And once he said he thought he'd turn Spiritualist, but it didn't last."

"And you yourself, Captain?"

"Well, between ourselves, miss, I see points in them

all, and perfection in none of them. My own idea is that a man doesn't take up religion at all heartily till he's married, and for myself I think it'll be something that combines the good points of all of them and yet is a creed distinct and apart. And I think it ought to have a smack of the country in it. Have you ever been in Wharfedale?"

"I can't say I have."

"I was there once for a week when I was a boy, and I have never forgotten it — grass slopes, and limestone hills, and moors on top of them — just the spot for a new religion. When I can afford it and am able to retire from the sea, I should like to set up on a farm there, and found the Wharfedale Particular Methodists."

Miss Dubbs clasped her hands. "What a noble work!"

The sailor took a grip on his courage. "Are you firmly convinced about the New Connection?"

"I must say it has points, many points, though on some of their circuits the arrangements for the minister are disgusting, and the things they expect his family to do are out of all reason. But since I left home and went into business, of course I've been into other places of worship, and naturally they opened my eyes to the fact that there are possibilities outside the New Connection."

"Miss," said the little sailor enthusiastically, "I never came across any one with your amount of sense in dealing with a question like this. In fact, the only

lady I ever discussed the question with — well, she was a disappointment."

"And who was she, pray?"

"Passenger I came across once on a steamboat. Very attractive lady. But she didn't seem to know there was anything that counted outside the Church of England, except, perhaps, the Romans, and, as she said, it was her idea that fancy religions didn't amount to a hill of beans."

"Then I shouldn't call her a lady at all. I should call her a cat."

"Oh, she was a lady right enough. A lady by birth, too; her father was a baronet, and her brother wears the title now."

"Why didn't you say so, then?" said Miss Dubbs sharply. She was annoyed at being caught out in error. "Of course, if she was a real lady of that sort, she would be bound to go to church."

"Then do you mean —"

Miss Dubbs nodded her elaborate black head impressively. "Never you mind what I do mean. You gentlemen who are officers at sea know a lot about the sun, and the moon, and stars, and boilers, and passengers, and geography, and all that. But, let me tell you, you miss a heap. You don't read. You don't know anything about society, and what society does, and where it goes to worship."

"It goes where its convictions carry it."

With obvious difficulty Miss Dubbs held back her superior information. "It will be time enough for

people like you or me, Captain, to think about changing over to — I mean to get ourselves into real society when we've a pile of money. And for the present, as you tell me you're out of a berth, I make no bones about telling you that, as far as I am concerned, my rich aunt shows at present no signs of dying and leaving me all her savings. In fact, she's even been so unkind as not to take the trouble to be born. I'm always hoping, of course, that some one will leave me a fortune; they always do in books, and it's cheering to look forward to the day when one will be rich; but for the present the salaries paid in our business are disgracefully small, and I tell you plainly it's as much as I can do to dress anything like respectably on mine, let alone buy the furs that a lady ought to have when she's in my position."

Mr. Kettle sighed deeply. "A lady like you will marry a rich man. You couldn't do justice to yourself on less."

Miss Dubbs bridled. "I hope my husband, if ever I have one, will some day become rich and powerful. But if any one was to suggest I should ever marry for money alone, I believe I should forget I was a lady and use vulgar language. If you read at all, Captain, you'd know that Mr. Charles — that all the best authorities tell you plainly that to marry for anything except love is simply to ask for trouble, and that last's a thing which yours sincerely is going to avoid if she knows it."

"Well, the Lord be thanked for that, though, to

tell the truth, I didn't think you meant anything else. But, miss, on my part let me tell you something, too. My idea of the matter runs like this: A man who asks a lady to marry him when he's got nothing but his ticket, and no money in hand, and no billet to go to, deserves a suit of tar and feathers. Mark, I'm speaking only of the business of the sea, because that's all I know about. But you can take it from me, miss, that its uncertainness can only be described as beastly. A man may to-day have the best kind of prospects imaginable; he may be known as a smart driving mate, good ship's husband, good navigator; and to-morrow, through no fault of his own, except that he honestly carried out his duty, he's — as a mate or a master — blacklisted to all eternity. That's the British mercantile marine."

From down the stairway a great voice boomed: "Miss Dubbs, bar, please."

"There's pa — well, the guv'nor if you like. I must be going. I'm three minutes past my time as it is, and he's nuts on punctuality."

"Half a minute, miss. I saw an accordion in the private room at the back of the Snug. Who plays?"

"Oh, pa thinks he does. But singing's his strong suit. He really can sing — if one cares to listen to those deep *Sailors' Grave* things that come right from the boots."

"Would an accompanist please him?"

"Why, can you play?"

"Better than most. I've every tune in the *Young*

Methodist's Hymnal Companion off by heart, and I can improvise as well. You find me, miss, in a bit of a desperate strait. I've lost my billet, and I'd no more sense than to let a brace of mud pirates rob me of all my ready money, and so I must put modesty aside, and say what I can do, and accordion-playing's one of the big items."

Miss Dubbs tucked an encouraging hand under Mr. Kettle's arm. "You come down with me, Captain. I'll put you on the ground floor with pa inside three minutes."

The landlord, as was natural, was skeptical at first; talked of accordion players he had known who were "equal to Padriwhiskey and Mahryall"; and spoke of the risk and strain to his voice in singing to an inefficient accompanist. But Mr. Kettle had the instrument in hand by this, had run his fingers over the keys, and presently was playing such a soothing improvisation to the little man's recitative, that presently the monologue stopped, and the small fist rattled the glasses on the table.

"By Jings, Captain, you're a take-in. I thought you were a tin-pot amytoor. Why, you're a bloomin' pro. I see what we're in for, and that's an evening of 'armony. Miss Dubbs, kindly take the captain's order. Mine's the usual. And ma will have a red port wine. And now, Captain, if you'll kindly do what you can with *The Bay of Biscay,* key of E flat, I'll supply the rest."

The concert took place in the inside private parlor,

in an atmosphere that was entirely unventilated, and rich with the mingled odors of tobacco smoke and toasted cheese, and as the glass door into the Snug was hospitably left open, that latter apartment was crowded with an appreciative audience who rapped approval of each successive item with sticks, feet, and tumblers. Miss Dubbs pumped beer, and drew whisky till her strong right arm was wearied; and when eleven o'clock and turning-out time arrived, there was a unanimous vote against any government that laid down arbitrary laws as to when a gentleman should leave enjoyment and go home to bed.

"By jings!" said the landlord hoarsely, as he locked the front door on the last customer's heels, and kept the rest of the atmosphere from escaping; "by jings! I've not had such a night since we opened here. This has got to be repeated. The customers will expect it. Miss Dubbs, we'll take a Dock and Joris, and I daresay you'd like a cream de mint yourself. Captain, as we say in the lodge, here's 'Round the Neck!'"

Captain Kettle stayed in free quarters at the Mason's Arms for a week, and at the end of that period found a job as timekeeper on a railroad extension works. The camp was some considerable number of miles away, and the employment was thoroughly distasteful to him. He ached to be back again at sea; but with scandal (as he was convinced) awaiting him in Liverpool, he chose the safer part, and prepared to lie low till the air cleared again.

On Saturday midday he was officially free, but in effect had to spend all the afternoon, and most of the evening, writing up books; and on alternate Sundays some of the gangs worked overtime, and he had to be on watch to check the hours to be paid for. His predecessor in the post, being a high-minded British workman, had decided he would be no man's slave, and had handed in his resignation in a manner that insured its instant acceptance. But to Mr. Kettle the hours were light enough. When engaged in his own profession, as a modern mate, he had taken it for granted that he had to work seven days a week, whether in harbor or at sea, and for most of the twenty-four hours of each of those days, so that with a training like that at his back, any shore duty was likely to come light enough. His main trouble was that the distance and these long hours made it practically impossible for him to slip away and see Miss Dubbs at Foston.

Save on his pay he could not. He was not extravagant. He liked his glass of beer and his pipe of tobacco; and though these were practically his only luxuries, it took practically every penny he earned barely to live. The reason was simple. He had spent all his grown life at sea, where food and lodging are provided as part of the scheme of life, and he had none of a landsman's training in buying these things for himself.

Moreover, and this was very typical of him, he was always conscious of holding a master's certificate,

and was very sensitive about living in any style which he conceived to be below a shipmaster's dignity. There are very strict sumptuary laws about these matters; and even if he had felt any inclination to give way on small points of etiquette, owing to force of existing circumstances, the thought of Miss Emily Dubbs in the background always kept him up to the most exacting letter of the sea rubric.

Miss Dubbs had swelled out her chest when she laid down the law on the matter, and had spoken with no uncertain voice. "If I was an officer," said she, "I'd be an officer. If I knew I was a captain, and I was down on my luck, and I went into a house of call, starving, and they asked me kindly to step into the kitchen and take my meal there, d'ye think I'd do it? Not me! I'd starve first. Why it would be like asking a bar lady to carry coals to a bedroom, or wheel out visitors' children in a perambulator."

It was Miss Dubbs, in fact, who rescued Mr. Kettle from the railway extension, and sent him to sea again; and the first news of her move was conveyed to the poor stranded sailor telegraphically.

"To Kettle Railway works Llandharmallic," it ran. "Come here immediate. Captaincy offers. Will expect you 5:25 train. Miss Dubbs."

His request to the engineer in charge for leave on urgent private affairs met with a flat refusal, couched in language that invited the blow to follow up. The engineer, as a point of fact, was in mathematical trouble at the moment over the amount of spoil it

would take to construct a certain "fill", and Mr. Kettle arrived in the office just in time to perform the function of whipping-boy.

But the mariner was taking no chances.

"I'd been aching for weeks," he explained pathetically afterward, "for a chance to spread that engineer's nose across his face, and send him home with his eye in a sling, and he knew it, and I make no doubt had taken his dirty precautions. I should have had time to have sewn him up all right, but the police would have been in by the end of the scrap, and I couldn't afford to waste a minute, much less risk a day. So I let him off; but, please the Lord, I'll meet him somewhere else, and attend to him in full."

So leaving his work entailed dismissal, and when once more he arrived at the Mason's Arms (this time with a small portmanteau), he was again in his previous condition of being out of employ.

Miss Dubbs leaned across the top of the bar and shook his hand with her best air. "I was all of a twitter to think you wouldn't be able to get away. It's Sir George who offers the job, and he'll wait for no man. 'Bring your skipper up to the scratch at six o'clock to-night,' says he, 'and I'll look him over. But if he isn't here by then he needn't come, because I shall run up to Liverpool after that, and get one of the proper shipping people to find me a master.'"

"Well, I'm here, miss, and my certificates are all that an owner can ask for. You didn't happen to

hear what the ship was, and where she was for? Not that it matters. I'd command a floating dock bound for the North Pole — yes, and guarantee to take her there, too, if an owner would sign me on for the job. But if you could give me a pointer on ahead, it might help in negotiations."

"The trouble is, I can't, Captain. You know that Sir George is — short, and brisk, and snappy. They'd been having a political meeting up in the coffee-room, and he came in here as usual for a word with pa — with the guv'nor, that is. You know he's our landlord — he's landlord of half the country-side, for that matter. Well, pa asked him about the flower show; would he be president again this year? And Sir George laughed, and said he expected he'd be in Morocco about flower show time if he could find a skipper for his boat. 'But skippers, they tell me, are hard to get at the moment,' says he, 'just, I suppose, because I happen to want one.'

"'Excuse me, Sir George,' says I, 'but if that's all your trouble, I can find you a perfect captain.'

"'Ah,' says he, 'that sounds like business. And why's he out of a billet? Drink?'

"'Steadiest young man I know,' says I.

"'Any other qualifications?' he asks.

"'There's no captain can work a ship safer or more comfortable,' I says; and though I've never been at sea with you, Captain, I'm sure that's right. And then I added something about your skill in music. I said nothing about what you told me about poetry,

because I thought that wouldn't help. But the music fetched him. 'The accordion is quite the finishing touch,' he says. 'Send your man along,' he says, 'and I'll interview him.'

"And that's the lot, Captain. The agent came and fetched him then before I could get in another word, and perhaps as well."

"Miss," said the sailor, "I don't know how to thank you for what you've done."

"Then don't do it. I suppose a lady may do what she likes for her own particular friends, and I never heard any law as to why she mayn't have men friends as well as the usual lady friends."

"You might tell me who Sir George is."

"Why, bless me, yes. I thought you knew. He's the big man round here, and a tiptop good sort. Head of everything, from the cricket club down to the county council; member of Parliament for the division, and a real popular landlord, in spite of the fact that he owns half the country-side. They say he gets his pound of flesh all right in rents; but if any one meets with a lump of hard luck, and can't pay, and Sir George hears about it, it's always, 'My good man, don't let your bit of debt to me spoil your sleep. Wipe it off, and try and do better next half-year. Tell your missis I'm sending her down a couple of brace of pheasants!'"

"Sounds a good sort."

"So you'd think. So I do think. He's the nicest great gentleman I know, and you'll find no one in

Foston to give him a bad word. But there's one, they say, can't get on with him — or else it's him that can't stand her."

"Trouble with his wife?"

"Captain, I don't talk scandal. But this is a business matter, and as I am a business lady, and have put you on to it, I think it's right you should know. Her ladyship is Sir George's little cross; and if she can't get on with a man like that, my opinion of her is that she's no better than she ought to be. But there's no getting over the fact that she leads him a dog's life of it when she's down here at the Hall; and when she's in London by what one reads in the papers, her goings-on are too rapid to be respectable. She's on the Riveera at present, gambling away our rents at Monte Carlo; and if Sir George wants to be safely off on a yachting trip by the time she gets back to England, I'm sure I'm not blaming him. And mark you, Captain, as I've told you more than once, my idea is that when a man marries a lady he should as a rule stick to her, whether, in the words of the Bible, she turns out better than he expected or worse than he dared to hope.

"But her ladyship's the limit, and if poor Sir George chooses to take himself and his purse out of her reach, I'd be the last to blame him. Oh, my word, here he is! I do hope he hasn't heard us talking."

Sir George Chesterman, as Mr. Kettle saw him then, was a burly, upstanding, tired-looking man of five-and-forty. He wore baggy, weather-beaten country

clothes, and had a face browned and lined by the wind and the sun. He had a retriever and a fat spaniel at his heels, and the easy manner of a man accustomed every day to meet all grades of the population.

"Well, Miss Dubbs, here I am; prompt to the hour, you see. And so you've managed to bring your nautical friend up to the scratch?" He nodded pleasantly. "You two haven't wasted much time either."

"Yes, this is Captain Kettle, Sir George."

"Then suppose we sit down and see what we can arrange. I understand that you've let the sea look after itself for the last year or so, Captain, and taken a turn at civil engineering?"

"I've been on the railroad works as timekeeper, sir, a very subordinate position, for just five months. I met with a little misfortune, sir, at sea, which I'd rather not explain unless you press for it; but it had nothing to do with my own professional competency, and my ticket was not dealt with, and indeed no inquiry was held that I ever heard about. There are my certificates, sir, if you care to look at them."

"We'll take them as read for the present. I'm afraid I must speak in rather a guarded way for the time being. You see, I don't know you, and, for that matter, you don't know me. Indeed, to begin with, I may as well tell you that this is no ordinary humdrum trip that I've got in mind. It will be a case of sailing from here in a small steamboat with sealed orders; and from a professional point of view, I don't see that

it can possibly lead up to much in the way of promotion after the job is done."

"That doesn't sound very encouraging, sir. You see, I'm young, and I don't want to get any marks on my ticket."

"You'd be a fool if you did. Moreover, here's another point: the business anyway will be risky, and very possibly will be highly dangerous."

Mr. Kettle squared his shoulders. "You needn't bring that into the account, sir," he snapped. "As I never suffered from nervousness as a mate, it isn't likely I should begin to shake at the knees if you're kind enough to promote me to be skipper. In fact," he added with a little sigh, "when troubles come along, it's mostly like meat and drink to me."

Sir George laughed rather hardly. "I should have thought that under existing circumstances you wouldn't want too much excitement to season your every-day meal. You ought to hanker after a humdrum, steady-going job with the maximum of screw and the minimum of risk."

"I know I should, sir, I know I should. But I can't help the way I'm built, however much I may regret it. Is the business gun-running?"

"I hadn't thought of that, though we might add it as a side issue. No, in one word, Captain, it's salvage. The story's a bit of an unlikely one, though I've gathered it happens with regularity at least twice or thrice a year. A steamer was coming home from a foreign port, and cargo shifted. As a point of fact,

she was loaded with copper matte — copper concentrates, if you like it better — worth some thirty-five pounds a ton, and she'd four thousand three hundred tons' dead-weight of it on board. If you work that out, you get into big figures in pounds sterling."

"One hundred fifty thousand, five hundred pounds," said Miss Dubbs, who by reason of her exacting profession was of necessity a lightning calculator.

"Good. And then you must add on anything between twenty and sixty thousand pounds for the steamer, according to the condition in which one finds her. Well, Captain, she's been reported a total loss, and Lloyd's have paid on her as such. The whole tale is quite understandable, I'm told."

"Quite. A breeze came on — a breeze abeam, and the old man daren't put her nose on to it because the chief told him that if she raced badly, either her engines would tie themselves up in knots, or else she'd drop her propeller overboard. So he kept her plugging along her course, and she rolled so badly that presently the cargo began to shift. That gave her a list to leeward, and every sea that hit her on the tall side sent more cargo sagging over, and the list got worse. The cargo being the copper ore you speak about, sir, they probably got hands below to do a bit of trimming, and when she rolled men got thrown down to leeward, and the heavy lumps fell in cascades down on top of them till most of them were crushed into a kind of pink beef jelly, and the rest cleared out

on deck, and neither guns nor belaying-pins could drive them below again."

"You seem to know the symptoms, Captain."

"You see, sir, I was shipmaster with a shifted cargo myself once. Coal it was."

"Well?"

"Oh, we got a tarpaulin on her aft, and that blew her stern round till she'd answer to the helm and show her other side to the sea, and that trimmed her again. Lord, but when that coal did cascade across, I thought it would go slap through her rotten old plates into the North Sea."

"Well, and what about the threatened ore boat?"

"Oh, they didn't know enough to get her round, or tried and couldn't do it, or the old coffee-mill broke down and she lost her way and kept getting badly swept, or a dozen other things might have happened. But, anyway, the crew decided they hadn't sufficient interest on board to stay there and get drowned, and they made off in the boats, and whether the afterguard were weak-backed enough to go with them, you know, sir, better than I do."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you. But I gather that the tale fell out much as you have told it, only the boats got swamped, and, so far as I know, only one man escaped drowning. He, as it happened, poor chap, was a cousin of mine, who'd kicked rather badly over the traces and had found it convenient to disappear. He was drifting homeward again, it seems, in this

boat's stoke-hold, and was very pleased with himself, because after hammering about the seas for three years as a trimmer, he had at last been promoted to being a full-blown fireman. You see, he'd once been a doctor with a very good practice, and just made the one mistake and — well, that won't interest you. Anyway, there he was. He got picked up by a South American beef boat when it was too late to be of use to him. He knew himself to be dying, and he'd seen every other man jack of his boat's crew go under before the ship turned up which found him.

"But here's the rum part of the tale. Before he died he wrote me a letter, which in due time was delivered. He said he wrote to me because in the past I'd been rather decent to him over a certain matter, and in return he wanted to put me in possession of a neat little fortune. He guessed (I suppose with a sick man's canny knowledge of such things) that his own steamer would be given up as a total loss, and he wrote to say that, barring the loss of boats and some superstructure, she was as sound as a bell, and her cargo not a penny the worse for its churning."

"H'm," said Mr. Kettle, "if your trip is to go hunting for an ore-laden derelict, sir, that's roaming about the seas as wind and currents direct, of course you may find her, if you can get in somewhere to coal often enough, and your patience holds out; or again you may not."

"Wait a bit, Captain. You have only heard Chap-

ter One of the tale. Chapter Two tells how she got embayed snugly behind certain islands that fringe a savage coast."

"Ah," said Mr. Kettle, "I don't wish to speak disrespectfully about any gentleman that was a cousin of yours, sir, but are you sure, sir, that this one wasn't seeing the visions and the geography of New Jerusalem before he finally pegged out?"

"Of course, there is that reading. But at any rate, his yarn is circumstantial. Listen, and tell me if there's any bad technical breaks. He says that when they put off there was a very heavy sea running, and the boat, which had been badly stove in the lowering, soon swamped. The air chambers kept her afloat, but before daybreak the sharks and the seas had eased her of half her people. Sometimes she floated right way upward, sometimes wrong, and on the whole they had (he says) a roughish trip of it. The amazing part of it was that in the morning there was the steamer, righted, and apparently little the worse for her bucketing, and only a mile away from them; and beyond again was the shore of Africa, with a fine line of noisy spouting reefs guarding it.

"The steamer and the swamped boat were in tow of a good brisk current, but the steamer was highest out of the water, and, when the wind got her, drifted fastest. She got nearer and nearer to the reefs, and at last among them, and my poor old cousin watched to see her strike and go smash. But in some way she

navigated clear of the rocks, though he said there was a regular graveyard of them, and he clearly saw her afloat on the smooth water inside.

"Then after that the tide changed, or the current changed — you know what twiddly things currents are, Captain — and the swamped life-boat got drawn out seaward again, and poor Fred seems to have had a pretty hazy notion of what happened between then and the time when the beef boat picked him up. It was all a muddle of sun, and birds, and thirst, and fellows dying, and more birds trying to pick his eyes out, and trouble about some lady patients coming to see him in his consulting room in Harley Street at home.

"And when at last he was hauled in out of the wet he'd a dose of angina pectoris, which as he said gave him due warning, and he'd just time to write this letter I told you of before another attack came along and (as the Captain of the *Argentina* wrote to me) finished him off. So there's the tale, and I want to know what you think of it."

"I don't ask you to tell me more than you wish, sir, but the first thing I want to point out is that there is a lot of coast-line to Africa. Did he mark off a likely bit?"

"He did."

"And is it likely to be disturbed? You said, if you remember, it was savage."

"I should say that local effort has looted anything it fancied off the derelict, but if you come to add that

up it probably won't amount to more than a few hundred pounds' worth. Tramp steamers of the brand that are chartered to carry ore are not usually fitted out with guns and swords and other tackle that would attract the savage eye. As for the copper matte, I can imagine their cursing when they got the hatches off and went down to have a look at it."

"And what about any other boat running in there, and sighting her, and towing her off, and claiming salvage, so that when you got there you would find the harbor bare?"

"If she had been found, Lloyd's would have been notified. They haven't, and, as a matter of fact, I have bought up all claims. If I told you the spot you would recognize at once that it is clear of all steam lanes, and there is not the smallest possibility of any craft blundering into that part of the coast and finding her."

"Then, sir, it seems to me you've got a cinch, and if you'll employ me as master of your salvage steamer, I'd be proud to undertake the business for you."

Sir George pulled rather a rueful face. "Do you believe in luck, Captain?"

"I believe that every man makes for himself the luck he deserves."

"That makes it rather worse, because I am free to own up to you that luck at present seems to have deserted me entirely, and as I'm going with this expedition myself for — well, for reasons — I should say the odds are I shall act as Jonah and wreck it."

"Sir," said Captain Kettle warmly, "don't you believe it for one instant. If you guarantee that the steamer's there and afloat, I'll guarantee to you, given a modest equipment, that I'll find her and bring her home. Yes, sir, the fact of your luck being down, and the trifle that half the tribes in Africa are showing their teeth and trying to keep her as their private yacht, won't stop me. Of course, this is always supposing you give me the job."

The big man's tired face lighted up with a smile. He had a very taking smile. "After the enthusiasm you have shown I don't see that I have any choice. So if in the teeth of all I've told you, you'll be good enough to accept the billet, it's yours to have. As regards pay, I don't know much about these matters, and I can't afford to be extravagant, but I'll give you the standard rate of salary if you will let me know what that is, and I'll also arrange for you to have a slice of the plunder if we manage to do our salvaging successfully. I must go now, but if you'll meet me at the station at 9:15 to-morrow we'll run into Liverpool, and I'll get your advice on chartering a ship. So good night for the present, and good night to you also, Miss Dubbs."

"Well," said the barmaid presently, "if that isn't a gentleman, every inch of him, may I never wear a diamond ring. I can see it's been a strain to you, all this talk, Captain, but you take it from me, you'll soon get used to him. Now you come into the Snug and smoke a quiet pipe."

"Miss," said the little sailor, "I'm going to show you something." He took an old, hard-seasoned, highly-polished brier pipe from his pocket and looked at it thoughtfully. "Pipes," said he, "are all right for mates, and this one's been a very firm friend to me. But I'm a skipper now, and I must drop junior officers' ways. I've got to keep up the dignity of my position, and that means I've got to smoke cigars from now on."

With the poker he carefully skimmed away the black coals from the top of the fire and exposed a glowing cavern of red, and into this carefully and reverently he dropped the cherished pipe. It simmered for a moment or two, and then flame leaped from it. Captain Kettle found occasion to blow his nose with unnecessary violence, but Miss Dubbs, who was standing at his side, watching the cremation, patted his arm reassuringly.

"You were quite right, dear," said Miss Dubbs. "Now that you are a real captain, you must always remember to keep up your position."

CHAPTER VIII

MR. McTODD GRACIOUSLY DECIDES

THERE was, as far as I can gather, no actual proposal. They never even got to Christian names, and only in moments of forgetfulness slipped out "dear". It was always "Captain", or "Miss Dubbs", from one to the other, but the fact of their engagement was public property, and the little landlord in his deepest voice had pronounced benediction, and the audience in the Snug had enthusiastically drunk their healths separately and in combination.

Not till the day after the bargain had been struck, and in a ship-broker's office in Liverpool, did Captain Kettle discover that Sir George was Sir George Chesterman, and though the coincidence of names struck him as peculiar, he did not somehow associate him with the Miss Violet Chesterman of the *Rhein* and the *Norman Towers*. They had not a feature in common, and, for that matter, as far as he could trace, not a taste in common. Miss Violet, according to her own account, was society woman to the tips of her shoes; Sir George loved the country and country pursuits, and hated the town and all its peoples.

To make assurance doubly sure he had asked the landlord of the Mason's Arms as to what other mem-

bers of the family ever came to the Hall except Lady Chesterman, and was promptly told "None." Sir George and his wife were a lonely couple with neither chick nor relative to brighten them, "which probably accounts," boomed the host in his moving whisper, "for her ladyship's tantrums. As I've often said to ma, if you've no children of your own, the best way to avoid dullness is to get other people round you, and that's why we went into the public line."

The steamer of Sir George's choice was finally run to earth — or to be more precise, to moorings — in the Tyne, opposite the Dolly Stairs, and Captain Kettle, after an impressive and respectful farewell to his fiancée, took train for South Shields, and engaged there a select but inexpensive lodging.

He traveled down in mufti because his mate's uniforms were having that extra band of gold lace added to the cuff which is the mercantile marine shipmaster's special ensign, but he carried the marks of the sea and his grade in the cock of his red torpedo beard, and in every line of his spruce figure, and more than one fellow-mariner inspected him with a curious stare as if to recall on which of the many seas they had met. It remained for the guard of the train at Kirkby Stephen to put the seal on this general recognition.

"Captain," said the guard, opening the door of Kettle's compartment and touching his hat, "there's a party in the rear coach that'll be handed over to the police when we get to Newcastle if some one don't take charge of him."

"Well?" said Kettle, tickled at the title but feeling the sedateness that was due to his rank.

"He say's he's a ship's officer, sir. It would be a pity for him to get into trouble if it could be avoided."

"What's the trouble? Is he drunk?"

"He's that, sir, and Scotch, and he's preaching a lecture to the other passengers in his compartment on the peculiarities of the English nose, as illustrated by themselves, and won't let them read their papers. It would be a charity, Captain, if you could do something, only"— the guard looked pointedly at his watch —"only you'll have to be quick about it."

"I'll go-look-see," said Captain Kettle, and jumped briskly out on to the platform.

The noise of argument came billowing out of a carriage window, and Kettle made for it, and put in his head.

"Gosh!" said a disheveled man inside, "it's the pirate. Mr. Mate, Mr. Picaroon, I've mislaid your name, but you're the very fellow I've come back to England to see. Ye'll ken I promised ye a yarn —"

"I know you did, and that's what I've come for, but I don't want to share it. Come along forward. I've got a compartment to myself there."

"And yon's a very wise obsairve. The yarn's full of humor, an' these loons here wad no' open their lips by way o' smile, though Nestor swore the jest were laughable. Ye can tell their seriousness by the cut o' their nebs. The quotation, by the way's, from

Shakespeare or George R. Sims, but I forget which. Ye see —"

"Come along, man, or the train will pull out."

"And the railroad company would be the gainer by half my fare. I'll no gratify them. Aweel, ma friends, ye may enjoy your disgraceful nebs in peace — if ye can — till ye meet me next. Mr. Mate, I'll take your arm, just to show ma friendly feeling toward yersel'."

Now to be saddled with a talkative drunken man is embarrassing to any one; but when you are a seafarer, with a good deal of ignorance of, and distrust for, English shore ways, and when, moreover, you are journeying to join your first command as captain, the situation approaches the tragic. Captain Kettle had a large experience of drunks, few men had more; and his usual treatment of them might be described as drastic but curative.

But here he found himself face to face with the very engineer, McTodd, who had in plain truth saved the lives of himself and his boat's crew out there in the Sargasso Sea (and incidentally one supposes saved the *Norman Towers* and her complement), and the ordinary treatment of tongue, foot, and fist seemed inappropriate. So he listened to Mr. McTodd's garrulous tale of how he sailed with the outraged *Rhein* into Tampico; how every officer on board of her "wanted to eat" him, but daren't; how (as a great triumph) he had been called on to translate the Spanish pilot's English into English the eye-glassed

German captain could understand, when they drove in between Tampico pier heads; and how the Germans threw him into jail in that city, and how the British consul, stirred into activity by his tongue, reluctantly got him out. It was a great epic.

"And where are you bound for now?"

"Man," said McTodd, "I'm out to seek my fortune. My father was Free Kirk meenister at Ballindrochiter, though there's many that's met his son have never guessed it, and a fine education was all the capital he could give me. The worrld's my oyster, as Alfred Tennyson has neatly put the situation, and here"— he waved a discolored thumb —"here is my knife wherewith I shall open it. Now you're looking prosperous yourself. Maybe you know of a billet?"

Captain Kettle was torn between gratitude and duty. "You're certificated, of course?"

"I'd scorn to deceive you. But in the academic sense of the word, I'm not. I know more of my craft than half the ducks that carry a chief's ticket will ever learn all their black lives through, but the Board of Trade will no' believe it. Ye see — in your ear — at times my spelling's phonetic, and that's fair ruin in an examination room."

"Well, that makes it difficult. I'm in want of a chief engineer. But the owner, I'm sure, would insist on his being fully qualified."

Mr. McTodd regarded his companion with an offensive eye. "D'ye you mean to tell me some philanthropist's been fool enough to put you in command of

a ship of your own? Well, well, there was a humorist once said it takes all sorts to make a worrld."

The newly-made captain was growing more and more restive under all this, and there were moments when his fingers itched to take their accustomed course; but each time with an effort he called his new dignity to his aid, and gripped his teeth into the butt of his cigar, and sat grimly non-interferant in his corner.

"And who did you say was your owner?"

"I didn't say. He wishes to keep in the background. Nor can I tell you what's our real port of destination. We clear for Falmouth and beyond, but really we sail with sealed orders."

"Oho! More piracy may I ask? That seems to be your taste, and I must say you've a pretty knack for it. For myself, I like to keep my skirts clear of this sort of thing, coming, as I've telled ye, from respectable stock. But for you, of course, being without a pedigree, it'll no' matter if your inclinations run that way."

"Now just you listen here," said the exasperated sailor. "You've got to the edge of my patience. Give me three more words of your lip, and I'll throw you out of the window."

"Gosh!" said Mr. McTodd, "I'd love to see you try," and made an active spring. But Captain Kettle's expert fist shot out and caught him in mid-air accurately on the angle of the jaw, and Captain Kettle's trained fingers thereafter twisted his neck-cloth till

he was three parts strangled, and then Mr. McTodd was violently thrown into a corner of the carriage, so that his head rattled against the company's woodwork, and he was told to stay there in words that there was no possibility of misunderstanding.

"You needn't shout," said the Scot, "and cause inconvenience to the rest of the passengers in the train, who, for anything you know, may be respectable people. Your words were pairfectly clear. If you wish me to sleep, I'll do it for the present. I've been in the sun. It's a thing that might happen to anybody; I've known even deacons of the kirk to suffer from the effects of the sun. So I bid ye good night. We'll renew the conversation later."

Now, Captain Kettle was by nature generous and hospitable, but he recognized the limitations of his new position. He was under obligations to Mr. McTodd that it would not be an easy matter to repay. But if he was going to ship the man as a subordinate officer on his new command, it would be an unheard-of thing to offer him hospitality in his own lodgings beforehand. Also, he was in very considerable doubt as to whether it would not be a betrayal of trust to sign him on at all. Of course, by the ritual of the sea service, as long as a man keeps sober and does his work while on duty, that is all that is required of him. His shore morals and habits are a matter of his own private concern. But would McTodd be reliable even at sea?

The little sailor thought these matters through over

two more cigars, and shook the engineer into wakefulness when at last the slow cross-country train dragged its weary length into Newcastle Station.

"Man," said Mr. McTodd, "I thank ye. I'm rested fine. Just in parenthesis, I'd like to tell ye that getting in the sun's no' a general habit of mine — it's a digression. I make no doubt (by your looks) that the same has happened to yourself, and that's why ye handled me so tenderly. I thank ye for that same. I've no' been put to sleep with such gentle care since I lay in ma mither's arms. Let me prospect; where's the third-class refreshment room? It's a habit with me, which you'd do weel to follow, to let first-class refreshment rooms alone. They gie ye the same sized whisky in the first at a greater price, and containing less bite to the cubic inch, and the company you find yourself in there is apt to be above your station."

"I've no time to drink with you," said Captain Kettle savagely. "My train leaves in a minute. Will you take the loan of a pound?"

"I thank ye for the kind thought, but for the moment I do not need an advance. Ye see the British consul in Tampico, guided by me, mulcted that Dutch skipper in good heavy damages for false imprisonment, and, as I am no' what you might call a wasteful body, I didn't spend it as the consul had intended on a passage home to England. No, man; I just got a cast across the Gulf to Vera Cruz, and got sent home to bonny Cardiff from there as a distressed British seaman."

"Well, come to the point. Do you want a billet?"

"Gosh! the generosity of these great powerful men who run the empire!" Mr. McTodd raised his eyes in marvel toward the roof of Newcastle Station, and nodded at the dirty glass. "It's no' every kind of post I'd take. For example, I'd refuse an archbishopric, as they say, the hours are too long; and Parliament I never had a taste for, and the peerage is overcrowded. But a nice quiet job as a mayor, now, where a cellar is keepit in the Town Hall—"

"By James, listen! My ship's the *Wangaroo;* she's lying in the river off the Dolly Stairs. If you show up there to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, passably sober, I will do my best to give you a job. If you arrive drunk enough to disgrace me, I'll throw you into the river. Good night!"

Mr. McTodd put his hands deep into his jacket pockets, tilted the clay pipe between his teeth till it assumed a meditative cock, and gazed on the rapidly retreating back of his companion.

"Vara full of the importance of his braw new captain's ticket is yon. It's a vara humorous situation, come to think of it. Weel, I've put a fine edge on to his temper, which as like as not some comparative stranger will benefit by later on. Oh, vara humorous! Captain Kettle, indeed, is he? Well, I'll sail with him, if I have to sign on as donkey-man. There'll be no monotony with Kettle as Old Man. Gosh! He's the sort that would find trouble in a ruridecanal meeting."

CHAPTER IX

THE STEWARDESS SIGNS

THE *Wangaroo* was a steamboat with a past.

At her birth she had been designed by a naval architect who was admittedly a genius, but who had the knack of never building a boat that paid. Her registered tonnage was seven hundred fifty, and her horse-power officially one hundred eighty-five. Her engines were early triple expansions of a pattern and design that were never repeated, and her pumps were a perpetual conundrum to the unfortunates whose duty it was to overlook their eccentricities. She had a double bottom of such size that it seriously ate into her hold space, and her lines were such as to give her the minimum of cargo capacity with a maximum of water friction.

Exasperated owners had from time to time so altered the plan of her weights that her metacenter had crept up inches at a time till she had grown to be alarmingly crank; and, similarly, through other interference with her frames, she was by no means as stiff as could have been desired. In moments of stress, it was held that she could roll three several ways at the same time.

She was built of iron — not steel — and though her

plates were comparatively thick, they were heavily corroded, and as incidentally she had bumped over sandbars and otherwise been aground far more times than a respectable boat ought to own to, she had sheared the rivets of a good many of her plates, and the concrete with which they had been replaced was hardly an efficient substitute.

In outward appearance she was sawn-off, stubby, and clumsy-looking. Her smoke-stack was fat and short, and she carried her standard compass on the top of a long pole. When she started life raw from the builders' slips she had yards crossed on both of her tall masts, but as the years went on and fashions changed, she shed these, and she steams into this chronicle carrying the rig of a fore-and-aft schooner.

Mr. McTodd, after a long study of her beauties, owned that he had seen her counterpart once before, and on being asked by his captain to name the locality, said it was on a cheap photographer's back cloth in Manchester. "But I never knew that was a picture of a real ship before I saw this old girl," said McTodd. "I thought it was a land artist's imagination."

Her history was hard to get hold of, but I have been at pains to rake up most of it. I will not repeat in detail here, because it implicates many worthy commercial men who have prospered since they got rid of her; but she seems to have had no fewer than twelve owners before she came into the hands of the merchant — he was really a ship-breaker — from whom

Sir George Chesterman chartered her, and to have changed her name no fewer than nine times.

I wonder how many people will recognize her as the *Vestis,* the *Polydorus,* the *R. K. Williams,* or the *Sosha Maru?* (She turned turtle, by the way, when she was under that Eastern flag, drowned her crew, and was salvaged by a Japanese sponge boat, after her water ballast had righted her.) She was also in her day the *Cormorant,* the *Golondrina,* and the *Devastation,* which last was when she was supposed to be a Venezuelan man-of-war, or rebel filibuster, whichever side of local hostilities you judge her from. Her other two aliases I shall keep to myself, as they suggests items of history which are better forgotten.

Finally, when Captain Kettle took her over, she was noted for being crank in a seaway, for carrying the minimum of cargo her tonnage dèmanded, for being a coal-eater of the deepest dye, and for taking long sheers to starboard when she was that way out, from which no amount of helm could wean her. She was, all the experts declare, the most undesirable seven-hundred-fifty-ton steamboat at that period afloat in any of the seas, and Captain Kettle who, be it thoroughly understood, had known better things — loved her.

Captain Owen Kettle, on his voyage from the Tyne to Grand Canary, was the busiest man in all his wide profession. He wore his mate to the bone, and he worked his heavy crew almost to mutiny, but by the time the disreputable old wreck which had left the

Northern river had waddled her way down to the Islands, she had a look of meretricious smartness about her such as she had probably never worn before in all her disreputable career.

Her paint was new, and her bright work glittered; her rigging was set up till it was as taut as bar-iron; her stanchions were straightened, and her dingy funnel was painted yellow with a jaunty stripe of green. And Mr. McTodd, the second engineer, working below among the ruins of her machinery, took up bearings and did other repairs while she was under way with a recklessness that can not be too severely spoken about.

"One hundred and ninety-four miles, sir, since noon yesterday," said Captain Kettle coming from the chart house after working out his day's run. "That averages eight-point-one knots an hour. We're whacking her up a bit, and I shouldn't wonder that if the wind gets a bit more aft and we can give her the gaff topsails I've had made out of those spare awnings, she may log as much as eight-point-two or two-five. She's a famous old girl when she gets decent treatment."

"You'll make the Cunard people green with envy if this leaks out," said Sir George. "Have a cigar?"

"We should bring-to for the Las Palmas health boat at three-twenty to-morrow, and that's allowing thirty-five minutes for retardation owing to a slightly heavier sea which I expect to get up when we run farther into the trade."

"As an experienced passenger, let me give you a tip, Skipper. Don't show the machinery of your calculations. We shore folk prefer plain miracles. There will be mails in Grand Canary which left England a week after we started. I suppose you couldn't cut the islands out of the program?"

"Not well, sir. We've burned a lot of coal getting here. And, if there's much work to be done on the African coast, I'll like to be rebunkered to our full capacity. We shan't be able to do very much with sail. The trades will be a bit too heavy for the old girl, flying light as she is, at this time of year. But don't you worry about the coaling, Sir George. You take a run up to the Monte while we're getting the stuff on board, and I'll have decks holystoned down as white as a table-cloth again by the time you're back. Though, of course, if it was cables you were thinking of —"

The big man shook a weary head. "I wasn't bothering about either coal or cables as it happened. Fact is, a friend of mine stated an intention of joining me down here, and, to tell the truth, I don't want to be bothered. I'm not feeling hospitable. You and I get along very decently together, Skipper, and a third might very easily upset the balance. If the worst comes to the worst, I have made arrangements that the — er — intruder shall be looked after, so you needn't worry your head about that. But I most piously hope that one of this excellent person's usual changes of plan will take place, and we shall find our-

selves undisturbed. I'm going to have a cocktail. Will you join me?"

"Not at sea, sir. If you'll excuse me I'll go and give the mate a bit of a brisk-up. That man's not served with me long enough even yet to learn my ways. He's letting those hands mutter while they paint."

Sir George Chesterman turned his tired eyes to the sea, and watched the fleets of pink-sailed Portuguese men-of-war that cruised placidly over the dark blue swells alongside. "I wonder," said he to himself, "what sort of a time a nautilus has of it? Seems a nice easy life. No cables, or party whips writing unpleasant letters, or wives with a taste for everything you happen to dislike, or — Pah! — what a sickly-minded ass I am. The odds are they have the whole lot — especially the cables. There must be rum customs and inventions among these navigating shellfish. Gad, I believe if I'd the chance of a swap I'd risk it. The more I think back at England, home and beauty, the more sick I seem to be of the whole lot of it."

The big retriever, scenting trouble, muzzled a sympathetic wet nose into his master's hand.

He drank the cocktail which the steward brought him, and laughed at a new idea. "Gad, it would be a great joke to diddle her, if she does turn up, and leave her to cool her heels among the Liverpool week-end-trippers at Las Palmas. I've a monstrous great mind to do it. Ah, there's the luncheon bell! Skipper, half a moment!"

"Sir?"

"I say, couldn't you put in at Lanzerote or one of these other islands, and do your coaling there?"

"It would be a long slow job. You see Lanzerote has no harbors, only open roadsteads, and as likely as not we'd have to hang there rolling to our anchors for a good fortnight before we could arrange with these *mañana* Spaniards to find a bottom which would bring the coal across from Grand Canary. And then, you see, you'd be a fortnight's grub and water to the bad which would have to be replaced, not to mention a fortnight on your charter and insurance, and a fortnight's wages, which would all be to the bad anyway. But I know what you're thinking of."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes, sir. It's those cases of rifles and the ammunition boxes in number two hold."

"I'm afraid you're wrong. I hadn't given them a thought. But what's the point?"

"Well, of course, in spite of promises, some one at the English end may have blown the gaff and told the customs at Las Palmas."

"Well?"

"If somebody definitely accuses us of attempting to import arms of precision into Africa, against international law, they'll try and stop us. By James, I should like to see them do it!"

The tired eyes brightened. "Why, would you kick?"

"Yes, sir, I'd kick good and hard, and I'd take the

old girl out of their harbor in spite of all the teeth they could show."

"That sounds interesting. But isn't there a fort or something?"

"I believe they've some guns. They were lying on one of the quays with their tails wrapped up in packing cases when I was round there a year ago. They were going to haul them on to a hill at the back of the Catalina, and mount them — *mañana*. I know, because I asked. You'll see when we get there they'll still be on the quay, all except the packing-cases which some one will have pinched for fire-wood."

"But supposing somebody had invented an energetic Spaniard, and they have been hauled up to the hill-top and mounted, and there is a filled mazagine alongside, and they gave you fair warning that if you didn't stop they'd blow you into the middle of next week, what then?"

"I should steam out and let them see the red duster blowing at my poop staff, and I should break out two more at my fore and main trucks, and I should like to see the beastly dagos dare to fire on those. And if they did, by James, I'd let them fire and be hanged to them, but I should be cock-sure they never could hit me. And now, sir, if you please, dinner's cooling."

"I wish," thought Sir George wistfully, "I had half this little man's enthusiasm, though the Lord only knows what mess he's going to land me into if he has only half his own way."

Las Palmas harbor, tucked away under the decayed

volcano of the Isleta, displayed the usual collection of British steamers, Canary bacalao schooners, and coal dust, and the warmth of the sun overhead was cooled by a racing trade-wind, which carried with it a strong scour of African sand. On the quays and in the coal lighters Spanish cargadores shouted musically, but did little work until they were urged thereto by profane British mates, and those units of the army of Spain which happened to be off duty appeared to be dangling their cotton-trousered legs over the edges of the concrete walls, and smoking interminable cigarettes. And over the whole harbor water was spread a scum of coal dust, and an odor of bacalao, imperfectly cured.

A grinning Parsee in an elaborately embroidered smoking-cap brought his boat alongside as Captain Kettle humored his precious *Wangaroo* up to the mooring buoy, and displayed Birmingham Benares brass, Teneriffe drawn-linen work, and Three Castles cigarettes to prospective buyers, adding for the benefit of the ignorant, "I am your fellow countree-man. I sell you best stuff, cheap-price. Also I have letter from lady to captain."

"Lower away the companion-ladder, Mr. Smith," said Captain Kettle to a mariner beside him on the upper bridge.

The little steamer, from her size, could at the utmost afford only two mates. But Kettle had picked from the crew a steady man who had signed on as A.B., had added ten shillings a month out of his own pocket

to his wages, and given him brevet rank as third mate from sheer delight at having an aide-de-camp at moments like these, when the mate was on the fore-deck, and the second mate on the poop, as by sea rubric ordained.

"If you can get that chattering baboon's boat underneath," continued Kettle, "let go your ladder by the run and stove him in. I'll let the son of a dog know what's the tariff for bringing off letters to me from ladies I don't know."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Smith, and ran briskly down off the narrow bridge, while Captain Kettle ached to think that in spite of all his care and instructions the *Wangaroo* might have been brought up more smartly to her moorings. And then, with his spruce uniform fairly straining with pride, he descended to do the honors of his own chart house to the port officials, and for the first time to write "O. Kettle, Master," at the foot of documents.

There was one unpleasant interlude. The Parsee managed to make his way on board, and again proffered his "letter from lady" to the new-fledged skipper. Spanish port doctor and Spanish port captain grinned knowingly, and Kettle arose in his wrath and kicked his fellow subject down over the side.

"Quartermaster," said he, "if that man or anything else that's escaped out of the monkey house gets on board again I'll disrate you."

The advent of the coaling company's agent handi-

capped his further remarks, and for the next hour Captain Kettle was immersed in the intricacies of the ship's business in a foreign port. And then came other tradespeople and touts innumerable.

The entry of Miss Dubbs was a marvel of quietness and discretion. Captain Kettle gulped and collected himself. "My James," he said, "you here, miss! Whatever's gone wrong?"

"Nothing, Captain. Is this your private cabin?"

"It's the chart house — yes."

"And are you at liberty at any time soon?"

"Yes — now. Here, you clear out. My dear, there must be something gone very wrong."

She laughed a little nervously. "I tell you nothing has happened, except that I've changed my job. Ah, there's Sir George's retriever. Good old dog, Rex. But haven't you got my letter? I sent one by a native in a boat."

"My conscience! That'll have been what that unbaptized Parsee was jabbering about. No, my dear, I never got it. But if you're in trouble, of course you've come to the right place."

"I tell you, dear, there was no real trouble. For a long time — in fact, all the time since I've known you, Captain, I've been a good deal dissatisfied with business in the public line, and when pa got a bit fresh with me the other night about not serving a gentleman with another glass when I said he'd had enough, I thought it was a good opportunity to quit, and handed in my resignation there and then on the spot.

I may tell you I'd had it in mind ever since Sir George spoke to me."

"My dear, you'd better tell me the whole thing at once. What's Sir George to do with it?"

"Hasn't he told you? Well, however, I suppose he thought we were too much in one another's confidence to have any secrets. Anyway, all he said was this, and mind, it was after you had left Foston, and were working on the *Wangaroo* at South Shields, as you wrote me. He comes in one day to the Mason's Arms, and he says: 'Miss Dubbs, do you know any reliable lady who'd go out on our little steamer as sort of maid-companion-stewardess to look after my sister? I don't want a maid altogether, because she's got one already who's no good for this sort of trip; I want something more than a stewardess; and I want something a bit less than the ordinary useless companion.' I laughs and says I didn't think there were many ladies yet born who were up to all those requirements, and he laughs and says he supposed they could be made. He's always a very merry manner with him, has Sir George, but he knows where to stop. He's always quite the gentleman."

"I've found that myself."

"Well, I said that if I came across any lady who would fulfil all his requirements I would let him know."

"'That won't do, Miss Dubbs,' says he. 'I sail to-morrow, and, according to Captain Kettle's calculations, our boat's going to take a most pleasantly long

time to reach Grand Canary, which is to be our first port of call. My sister's got the date out of me, and declares she's going to follow by the mail boat, and join at Las Palmas. I don't think she will; it's a score to one she changes her mind between now and then; but if she doesn't, she sails by the Cape mail boat from Southampton to-day week. Now, I don't want her to go unless she has the escort I have been describing to you, so if you see your way to providing the young person, just drop her a line to this address, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you '."

"Ah," said Captain Kettle, "but I never thought of your coming down to this sort of business, dear."

"And what sort is that, please?"

"Well, stewardess?"

"I prefer to call it 'companion'. But whatever it is, Captain, my idea is that, as I was a minister's daughter and a lady once, a lady I shall always be. How's that?"

"Right as usual," said the little sailor with a sigh. "But there may be more complications in this than you think."

"You mean the trip's not safe? There may be trouble with those tribesmen where the wreck is lying. Well, I'm ready to take what comes. Or, I'll put it this way if you like: what's good enough for the gentleman I'm engaged to is good enough for me. Besides, it seemed likely to be my only chance of foreign travel. We must look things in the face, Captain; when we are married it is quite pos-

sible I shall have to stay at home from then afterward."

Captain Kettle tugged vexedly at his red torpedo beard. "Quite true, my dear — quite true. But those aren't the only complications. Does it occur to you what I am on this ship? Do you understand that the second mate, who's fifty-five, if he's a day, refers to me as the 'old man'— and I'm twenty-seven? Do you know that here on board ship you'll have to give me respect, and say, 'Yes, Captain,' and 'No, Captain,' when you speak to me? That's discipline."

Miss Dubbs rose to the whole of her statuesque height. "And pray when," said she, "have I ever done anything else?"

"No, quite true," said Kettle miserably. "It'll come easier to you than it would to most. And, of course, if you call it 'companion,' and not 'stewardess,' and only sign on ship's articles for a shilling a month — as Sir George's sister must, of course, seeing that we don't carry a passenger certificate — well, a lot may be overlooked. But, in ways that you don't understand, you really do make it remarkably awkward for me. I wish you'd told me beforehand that you'd got this in mind."

"And then you'd have headed me off? I knew the African coast where you are going to was a dangerous spot."

"Quite so. I expect it is."

"Then, as I've said before," replied Miss Dubbs

comfortably, "what's good enough for you, my dear, in that line is good enough for yours truly. So don't let us have any more grousing." She took out a hat-pin, and stood before the glass and prinked up her elaborate black hair. "Of course, some girls might even have expected you to say you were pleased to see them."

"Aye, but," said Captain Kettle doggedly, "there may be other complications still. You say you are Miss Chesterman's companion. Did you travel out together?"

"Thank you, I know my place. She went saloon. I, of course, came second cabin, and very comfortable and social, I may say, I found it; though, to be sure, being a South African boat, there were more Jews than some people could have fancied."

"Well, there you are, my dear. We've no second cabin here. We haven't a mess room. The engineers take their meals in the saloon with Sir George, and me, and the mates; and a nasty feeder the chief is, if ever I saw one. You've your choice, miss, between that and the fo'cs'le."

"Does the cabin steward dine with the common sailors and firemen?"

"Oh, I expect he gets his bit in the pantry, standing up. No one ever worries as to where stewards mess, unless it's on a big boat, where they have a proper glory-hole. No need to trouble about stewards; they keep fat enough, and never worry about any Board of Trade whack."

"I shall take my meals with the steward, Captain, and I've no doubt that, if he's a gentleman, he'll provide me with an aërated water case to sit upon."

"It's disgusting to think about the lady I'm going to marry doing this sort of thing, miss, while I'm sitting down getting my meals with Sir George and his sister."

"You're different. You're there because you're captain, and head of the table on your own ship is your lawful position. But I know my own place, just as you know yours, and I'm going to keep it; and don't you try and make no alteration, because I won't stand it. So now, Captain, you plainly understand. You'll kindly look upon me as a stewardess, and treat me exactly as such while I am on board here under your command. And now, my dear, I'll bid you good day for the present, as I've to go back ashore again to the hotel to pack up Miss Chesterman's trunks."

CHAPTER X

RE-ENTER THE NORMAN TOWERS

BY an amiable eccentricity of the British shipping laws, a vessel which does not own that expensive luxury, a passenger certificate, when she does carry passengers, as so frequently is the case, signs them on before shore officials as members of her crew. Thus, Sir George Chesterman, M.P., wrote his name to the wholly erroneous statement that he was a qualified ship's surgeon, and that he was content to serve as such for the entirely inadequate salary of one shilling sterling *per mensem.*

Miss Violet Chesterman declared that she assented to certain conditions of service as read out to her, and agreed to conform to them in all items, also on the same cheap terms; and bracketed with her name appeared the name of Miss Emily Dubbs, as an indication that she had taken similar vows. And so over all of them Captain Kettle, as master, held powers of the high justice, the middle and the low, as by Law of the Sea ordained.

It is a fair thing to say that, on the run from the Islands to the African coast, there were three acutely uncomfortable people among the *Wangaroo's* afterguard — namely, the two women and Captain Owen

Kettle; and there were two — to wit, Sir George Chesterman and Mr. Neil Angus McTodd — who both understood the situation and were cynically amused at it. Rex, the big black retriever, who had also a strong sense of humor, in moments when he was alone with Sir George, showed by grins and wrigglings that he also was highly tickled by surrounding events.

Captain Owen Kettle on his part kept up a constant activity. When once they were clear of Grand Canary — without interference from the authorities, by the way — he mustered all hands on deck, and made announcements.

"Men," he said, "Sir George Chesterton, M.P., has chartered this ship to go and look for a steamboat that is embayed behind some reefs off the African coast. You've heard most of the tale already, I know, because it's been talked of in the cabin at meals, and what's discussed there always gets forrard. Now it's not likely the tribes over yonder will give any trouble. They are the peoples of the Sus country, and the Sultan of Morocco has given them such a bad time on every occasion when he has arrived down there to collect taxes that they ought to be civil to every one who doesn't happen to come from Morocco.

"Besides, we've got a cargo below — I don't mind telling you now — of rifles and ammunition which we are open to selling to deserving tribesmen on reasonable terms. At the same time, I'm not taking anything to do with colored men on trust, and if they are anxious for trouble, I'm exactly the man to give

it to them. For that reason, I intend to teach you all how to get off a gun without shooting any of your neighbors, and with a reasonable chance of hitting the mark you're aiming at. Now, then, are there any experts among you?"

There was a pause, and the crew looked at one another sheepishly.

"That's better. I like modesty. Any one ever even handled a gun?"

A grimy fireman threw the sweat rag over his shoulder, stood out, and came to military attention. "R.N.R., sir. Stoker rating. I've learned my drill, but I'm only what you might call a fourth-class shot."

"You're one of the men I want. Come now, what are you two on the hatch grinning about?"

"I was just saying that I was a pretty good game shot, sir, before I came to sea, and Somers, my mate here, was the same. In fact, it was because we was such good shots we thought it better to leave where we was ashore. But we neither of us ever handled a rifle. Shot-guns was what we was brought up with."

"Brace of poachers, were you, eh? Well, your morals will have had time to improve since you've been abroad of me, and your shooting will come back to you. Step up now. Anybody else?"

A bent, old, bald-headed man piped out: "I was quartermaster, sir, once on a China boat with a coolie crew, and two or three times when they or the Chow passengers got fresh, the old man — I should say captain — served out Winchesters to us whites. I

never let off mine, but I got to know the handling of her, and I guess if I'd one given me now I wouldn't shoot any of this crowd, even if it did come to be a bit exciting. But I don't know as I could hit anything I aimed at unless the mark was mighty close."

Captain Kettle from his elevation stared down upon them sourly: "You're an unpromising lot of toughs. I wonder what you'd call yourselves on a census paper. Sailors you certainly are not. Well, with the Lord's help, I'll lick you into some kind of horse-marines before I'm through with you. Bo's'n, break up two cases of those rifles from number two hold, and distribute them round. You Reservist, you Black Poacher, you Red Poacher, and you Coolie Driver, I appoint you corporals for the time being. If you're efficient you'll get an extra tot of rum a day. If you aren't, and you can't drum sense into your squads, you'll hear from me personally, and so will they. Now, you've each got seven men apiece, and two extra that you can toss for, and your first job is to teach them which end of the rifle to hold, and how to carry it about without poking anybody's eye out. I'll give you twenty-four hours to do it in. That's the lot. Get away and set to work."

Sailormen are proverbially grumblers, but this crew (as Kettle expressed it) had the vice thoroughly worked out of them by this date. They had come aboard in the Tyne, bleary, ragged, sullen, mutinous, and owing to the slight mystery which hung over their enlistment, thought they were going to have an

easy idle time of it. Never were crew more disillusioned.

An iron discipline descended on them and held them in rigid grooves. They were worked mercilessly at chipping ironwork, painting iron and woodwork, setting up rigging, calking decks, holystoning decks, and a hundred other laborious operations; a blow followed a sullen word; a savage kick was the reward of a laggard arm; and the utmost was extracted from every one.

As a result, as far as man could make her, the homely little steamer was as smart as a yacht, and the all-nation rapscallions who manned her had been turned into a crew of hard, strong, well-disciplined men, quick to answer an order, and in all ordinary sea matters skilful to carry it out. The big burly member of Parliament watched the transition with an appreciative eye. He had seen men driven in politics, and had been rather contemptuous of the result. It struck him that after they had undergone the process the most of them ceased to be men.

But here the process was reversed. The raw products that Captain Kettle had commenced on were most of them less than men, and under his remorseless drill he had (as it appeared to Sir George) converted each one of them into the complete super-seaman.

After the lapse of twenty-four hours hands were again called on deck, and they appeared smartly enough, each carrying his rifle in the method that appealed to him best. But they all handled their

weapons as if they had at least a nodding acquaintance with them.

"Now, I've no idea of turning you sailors into a squad of infantry," said the little captain. "I don't see that it would make me any the happier to have you taught soldiers' drill. But you've got to learn to shoot off those guns without shutting your eyes; and if you can learn to hit a target, so much the better. Bo's'n, get up a thousand rounds of cartridges, and make fast twenty-five fathoms of line on to the case when you have emptied it, and tow it astern. I don't suppose any of you men will hit it, except by accident; but the spouts in the water will show you where your shots go, and firing at a bobbing target like that will be much better practice for you than blazing at a fixed mark on a steady beach. It may occur to those among you who've got thinking machines that a man, when he's being shot at, doesn't always keep quite still. The main point I want you to remember about this rifle practice is, don't hurry. Fourteen shots that miss don't do near as much damage as one that's well thought out and plugs the other party in the liver. That's a military fact."

Captain Owen Kettle, at that period of his career, was not in any way learned in the art of war. But at the same time one is forced to admit that he had a fine natural instinct for it.

To be sure, he was hampered by no text-book knowledge of pipe-clayed military science, but out of his inner consciousness he evolved a scheme, and, as

it subsequently proved so eminently successful for irregular warfare, it may be here commended.

In a few words, it may be described thus: "First catch your man, and take care he is not in a state of prosperity; work him and handle him till he is as hard as a nut, quick as a flash, and bold as a bull-terrier; and then teach him to shoot and take cover. Leading will do the rest."

The letter from Sir George's cousin, that unfortunate medical man from Harley Street who had gone astray, on which the plan of the whole expedition was built, though excellent in many details, was weak where it touched on the exact art of nautical astronomy.

The admiralty charts, also, of the whole of the West African seaboard are notoriously defective, and those of that section of the coast which just then interested Sir George Chesterman and his skipper were worse than this — they were imaginative. They marked reefs where there was none, islets where the sea swells swept unchecked, and deep waters to which ominous breakers gave the open lie. Once, a good five miles out from the rolling dunes of the beach, the *Wangaroo* stopped suddenly in her steady eight-knot gait, shivered a little, and then went on; and Captain Kettle shivered also when he thought how near he had come to casting away his first command.

Henceforward the steamer kept an offing where the depth of water was beyond suspicion, and crows' nests were rigged whaler fashion at the mastheads,

in which the hands took it in turn to be seasick, and to search the shore-line with strong binoculars.

Even then they missed the object of their search on the first run down the coast, but when they had passed the southern limit of possibility, the *Wangaroo* turned north again to repeat doggedly the hunt with more thoroughness, and at a slower pace. This time, when an atom of doubt rested on the exact position of the shore-line, a boat was manned and sent away to explore it at closer range, and the jottings on the chart which indicated this boat's discoveries, as afterward forwarded by Sir George Chesterman to the proper quarters, form to-day a very useful addition to the world's knowledge of hydrography.

That northwest coast of Africa had by no means the smooth shore-line the authorized sea maps would have led them to believe. It swung out into gulfs and bays, and was incrusted with islets; here, the mouth of a dead river that had once (perhaps no further back than Roman days) flowed from the Sahara country, showed a silted lagoon dry at half-ebb; there, sand-polished rocks and a scour of current had made a deep-water harbor, in which a navy might moor.

For miles the coast would show nothing but barren rock and roasting sand; then a few lean palms would straggle across the crest of the dunes; and once in a way, in the mouth of some wady that carried a trickle of moisture, there would be a genuine patch of good dense tropical bush. But on the whole, the coast-line

and its islets were for mile after mile sterile and uninviting, and for a big ore steamer to be tucked away there in hiding seemed to be a thing impossible.

Twice indeed there were loud cries of, "There she is!" and consequent excitement. But the first, on nearer inspection, proved to be the shell of a wrecked iron sailing ship, a ruin that had been grilled there by twenty years of outrageous sun; and the cause of the second alarm showed itself on examination to be no ship at all, but an outcrop of red hematite rock fashioned presumably by Satan for their irritation and annoyance.

"This," said Sir George, fanning himself under an awning, "isn't nearly as amusing as I expected." He and his black retriever had been off in the boat on the lure of the iron outcrop, and the pair of them had been nearly cooked alive on the passage, and narrowly escaped a spill in getting back on the rolling steamer. "The ice-chest's empty, the fresh meat is finished, and by the taste of the water the cook makes tea and things of, I should imagine that some one must have been drowning a ferret in it. Also the coat of mold that collects on the outside of my cigars doesn't improve their flavor. I say, Skipper, what about turning back?"

"You're owner, sir," said Kettle stiffly. "It's for you to give orders."

"What do you say, Violet?"

"I agree with you that it's acutely uncomfortable" —she glanced out of the tail of her eye at Captain

Kettle —" in more ways than one. But I don't think you ought to give the thing up so long as there's a chance left. It isn't as if you were a rich man, George, now. If you found the ship and realized on her, you'd be put nicely on your financial feet again, while if you don't, I should say you'll find yourself badly dipped. This trip must have cost you a tidy penny, one way and another."

"And is continuing to cost so much a day. I'm beginning to think poor Fred wrote that letter when he was light-headed, and that he never really saw the steamer again, once he had left her."

"I don't agree with you a bit. Remember I knew Fred as well or better than you did, and he hadn't a particle of imagination in the whole of his composition. He was the most literal matter-of-fact sort of person that ever bungled a medical practice. He prided himself on unemotional observation, and if he says there were islands and a steamer behind them, islands there are and a steamer there is. Don't you agree with me, Captain?"

"Miss," said Captain Kettle, "I'm a man without imagination myself. Sir George showed me the letter, and I read it eight times over, and saw nothing in it but plain straightforward statement of fact. We may, through my want of skill and eyesight, fail to find the spot he speaks about, or he may have gone badly adrift in his longitude, but I'll stake my ticket on it that he saw what he says he saw."

Amusement flickered in Sir George's tired eyes.

"You're quite an enthusiast, Skipper. Well, Violet, if you can stick it for another week, I suppose I can, too. The skipper must try and make things as easy for us as he can manage it."

"I quite agree to the last proviso," said Miss Chesterman mischievously.

Mile by mile to the northward, the *Wangaroo* searched during the hours of daylight, lying-to at night so as not to overrun her ground in the dark, and one blazing day succeeded another without tangible result. But in the cool of one evening, success arrived at last. A hail came from the crow's nest which was perched up higher under the fore truck. "The bridge there."

"Aye."

"D'ye see a hummock broad on the starboard bow, sir — just on the edge of the coast? Seems to me two colors, sir — mustard-yellow and blue."

"That'll be the sunset, you fool!" said the elderly second mate from the bridge. "I can't see it myself. Wait till I get the glasses."

The look-out man in the crow's nest on the mainmast took up the tale, and the pair bawled down their news ding-dong.

"There's water in at the back of that land, sir."

"River mouth, sir."

"Looks to me a lagoon, sir."

"There's water on beyond again, sir. I just then got a glimpse of it as she rolled."

"That's an island off the coast, or a row of them."

"What you see is not the coast, sir — or, at any rate, there's a big river in at the back of it."

"There's a lagoon stretching right along. You can pick out points of it where the sun catches the water."

The old second mate stared through his glasses, but naturally could make out nothing, as the lower edge of the shore-line was well below his horizon, and so in the end he contented himself with the curt, "Aye, aye," of acknowledgment.

He was a stupid man, and prided himself on his stupidity. He was hired (according to his theory) to act as second mate of a seven-hundred-fifty-ton steamboat, and not to make discoveries.

But Captain Kettle at the first note of news had walked briskly along the immaculate decks, had swung himself into the fore rigging, and had run nimbly aloft, and presently, passing outside the barrel which formed the crow's nest, stood on the upper edges of it with an arm round the masthead just beneath the truck.

Those on deck saw him there, a small white-clad figure, sawing backward and forward against the evening sky, and peering dexterously through a long telescope at the shore and what lay beyond. Voices stopped. The *Wangaroo* slipped through the swells in silence, except for the dull internal rumble of her engines. All owned afterward to having felt a curious premonitory thrill.

To those who watched, Kettle seemed maddeningly

slow. They watched his long telescope saw up and down in constant arc as the steamer rolled, they watched him pick up the invisible ground beyond their horizon and examine it, as it seemed, foot by foot, and then he swung back and commenced the search all over again.

Sir George tried to break the tension. "Well, Skipper," he hailed. "Is that the place?"

"Couldn't say, sir," came the chilly reply, and again the audience watched the telescope plod slowly over the coast-line. The sun, in a ball of scarlet fire, was sinking in visible inches below the western horizon, and Captain Kettle's white drill uniform was tinted pink by the afterglow.

But presently from the masthead came the hail. "Mr. Forster!"

"Sir?" said the fat old second mate.

"D'ye see that hummock lying about due east, with the stripes on it and a table top? Just take a bearing."

The second mate peered at the mark and then squinted down at the binnacle. "East by south a quarter east, sir."

"Can you open out any land behind it?"

The old fellow peered again. "No, sir. The hummock's on my sky-line, with a clean edge to it."

"Very good. Then call away the surf-boat, and get water and some biscuit into her."

Captain Kettle came down from aloft as briskly as he had gone up, and it was typical of him that he

did not make any pronouncement to satisfy the curiosity of his crew. Instead, he went quietly to where Sir George sat with his sister, and gave the news to them.

"There's a regular fishing-net of islands in at the back there. I can see no trace of our steamer, but it's quite possible she's there. Many of the islands are a tidy size, and she might easily be tucked in at the back and out of sight. I can't take the steamer in without a lot of sounding, so I'm going off in the boat."

"Not yourself? Not by night?" It was Miss Chesterman who raised the objection.

"It will be cooler for the men for one thing, miss, and in a couple of hours from now when the moon's up, it will be just as easy to see as in daylight."

"You'd better go, too, Violet, if you think the skipper needs chaperoning."

"I'd love to."

"The dew'll be very heavy, miss, drenching, in fact. Besides, if we find what we are looking for, we shall have to do a lot of sounding, and I may be away a couple of days. I couldn't undertake to look after a lady all that time in an open boat."

"Oh, all right," said Miss Chesterman, and frowned at her brother, who had caught her eye behind Captain Kettle's back and winked. That officer had gone to the side to see if the boat's company and the rest of her equipment were to his taste, and presently returned to his room for a revolver and a bottle of

Horner's Perfect Cure, which he stowed in his outside pockets.

"The drug's a guard against malaria, sir," he explained. "Sea chills just about twilight are very dangerous in this climate. I shall give all hands of my boat's crew a tot of Horner presently, and you'll see they'll never turn a hair. Mr. Mate, I leave you in charge. I may be gone up to three days. Hang on here till then, and if we don't turn up, send in another boat, well armed. It's just possible we may get spilt in the surf or stove on a reef, and need fetching off. Miss Chesterman and Sir George, I wish you good evening. With luck, I hope to be back on board here again before breakfast."

A naked rope dangling down the *Wangaroo's* sleek black side was the only highroad to the boat, and Mr. Kettle went down it nimbly hand over hand, walking with his feet against the ship's plating. From bow and stern the guess warp was dropped, and boat-hooks thrust the boat out from the ship's side; oars rose and fell into the water and settled comfortably between their thole-pins: and at "Give way", the oars bit the surface as one machine, and the boat gathered way.

"Good luck," shouted Sir George from the rail, and Miss Chesterman, with moist eyes, waved an atom of handkerchief, and the black retriever swung a thoughtful tail. Captain Kettle waved in return, and then his eyes sought a lower level, and ran over two or three of the round cabin port-holes. Apparently he

saw what he sought for there, for he waved again, and lifting his nose fancied he scented in the air the faint trace of the frangipani which Miss Dubbs affected for her toilet.

The watchers followed the surf-boat with their eyes till night snapped down with tropical suddenness; and as at the same time the steamer's lights were kindled, and dazzled the eye, the boat vanished into the gloom which had come down to cover the sea.

Violet Chesterman shivered. "I believe I'm afraid," she said. "Anyway, it's quite a new feeling, and I can't think what else it can be."

"Then you ought to be rather pleased," was the brotherly retort, "as I suppose you mean it's a new and therefore pleasurable sensation for you. In the meanwhile, if you're thinking of yourself, I've reason to believe that the ship is being efficiently looked after by what's his name — oh, yes, Trethewy, the mate. I can't imagine your fears are on behalf of our excellent skipper. He strikes me as a man one couldn't get killed however much one tried. So come along down to dinner. That unfortunate steward has been banging that tin pan he calls a gong this half-hour back. Look here, Violet, I'll bet you a pair of gloves that as Kettle's out of the way that Scotch engineer takes us under his kind patronage, and that his own official chief looks blue murder at him but under the baleful glance of your distinguished eye eats his victuals in respectful silence."

"Pooh!" said Miss Chesterman, "you don't pro-

vide yourself with gloves at my expense by obvious tricks like that. Kindly remember I had the advantage of being introduced to Mr. McTodd's little ways long before you had the felicity of his acquaintance."

But Mr. McTodd, as it happened, was not in the saloon when the pair sat themselves down to table. He was in the alleyway outside the steward's pantry, commenting to Miss Dubbs on the pleasantness of the night, the real smoothness of the sea (in spite of the deceptive look of heavy swell) and the general desirableness of boat trips.

"A junk like this," said Mr. McTodd, "unless very efficiently looked after in the engine-room, always strikes me as here and there unsafe. But for real security give me a sound, diagonal, teak-built surf-boat, with just enough leak in her seams to keep her sweet. You can't sink a craft like that. You may even fling her ashore if you like, and with a bit of strength you can get her off again, equal to new. And with biscuit, and a fair wind, and a small keg of whisky you can go round the world in her. Weel, I was going into supper — dinner I should say — but I've lost my appetite. I've been packing glands all day, and the smell's injurious to the mucous membrane. I'd take it as kind if you'd join me in a pasear along the lower deck."

The trade-wind freshened till it blew a gale, and the little *Wangaroo,* a small speck in that great turmoil of water, with her engines slowed down till they

just held her in position, rolled, and bucked, and plunged, and pitched, till more than one expert thought that she would heave her masts overboard. Everything on board of her, from coals and shovels, to dinner plates and hair-brushes, kept up its own separate noisy dance, and even the most hardened of her human complement was nauseated with her dizzy lunging.

"A man," said Mr. McTodd, as he placed thermometric fingers on the thrust-block bearings to make sure that the racing propeller shaft was not heating them unduly, "a man would need the bowels of a sea-gull to stand this sort of merry-go-round unmoved. I wish one of those poets who blether about the cradle of the deep would come below here and try the effect of being rocked in the cradle of this three-by-five shaft tunnel."

"Those that go down to the sea in steamships," said the chief engineer, "see the wonders of the deep. McTodd, I'll trouble you to come out of that rabbit run, and give me a hand with this condenser. She's coughing like a sick Hindu again, and I expect the mate'd have a fit if I told him we were within an inch of a breakdown any minute, and he'd better make his preparations to heave to under sail. Be careful, man, now. I'd hate to have you inconvenience me by getting killed by that walking-beam."

Night dragged through, and day came, and still the reinforced trade blew with unabated force, and the little steamboat continued her dizzy dance. The wind

blew hot now instead of chill, and presently (as the sun climbed higher) gave one the idea that it had been passed through a super-heating apparatus before it was let loose on the *Wangaroo*. It was laden, too, with a fine grit which lodged in all the steamer's crannies on deck and below, in the morning coffee, in the eyes, in the bearings of the machinery, in Miss Chesterman's black hair, in the apple tart which the cook baked for luncheon, and (this most emphatically) in the innermost mechanism of everybody's temper.

But when at last the blazing afternoon drew to a close, the wind eased, and the sand-storm dropped; and on the edge of night the surf-boat was sighted putting out from behind a shoulder of the land.

It seemed to the women who watched, that no small boat could live in that run of sea, but she held stolidly on, her oars like the legs of some uncouth insect beating the water rhythmically. The faces of her people, when they came near enough to be seen, were woodenly unconcerned; and when the acrobatic feat of getting her alongside, hooking on, and hauling her up to davits had to be performed, one might have taken it (from the looks of the actors) to be an ordinary concern of every-day life, instead of one of the smartest pieces of sea juggling on record.

"By God! Skipper," said Sir George, "you've given us all a bad fright. I never thought you'd get on board again in one piece. The sea's awful."

"I take the sea as I find it, sir, and don't complain.

My boat crew's passably efficient. I will say that for them."

"Well," said Sir George, rather piqued, "if we were sick with anxiety, I'd like to point out you don't look too brisk yourself. You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"If there were such things, I'd have seen one surely. We've found your steamboat, sir. You remember her name?"

"You've found her, have you? Well, now, that's capital hearing, and almost worth all we've gone through. Her name, do you say? Was it washed out or something? Her name? I suppose I must have come across it somewhere. It wasn't in Fred's letter, of course. Oh, no, I remember my solicitors dug it out for me. But I'm afraid I've forgotten it; I've a rotten memory for names. However, if it's of importance, we can easily turn it up. I've got their letter among the other papers in my despatch-box down in my room."

"I can tell you her name, sir. She's the old *Norman Towers*. Her master, Captain Farnish, with his wife, brought me up from the time I was a little kid of two years old, and those two were about the best friends I had got in the world, and better friends than most men ever had. Captain Farnish, I suppose, is drowned, and seeing what's happened to his ship, that's the best thing that could occur to him. But as for ghosts, if there were such things, I should have seen his when I went on board. In the chart house

there was a red velvet chair with a caster off that I've known for years, and the old lady's portrait, and his pipe — his frowsy old meerschaum pipe — I say his pipe — sir, I mean his pipe! If you'll excuse me, I will go to my room. I feel I need a bit of sleep."

CHAPTER XI

DISENGAGEMENT

"I'M dreadfully sorry," said Sir George next morning, "that I didn't think of telling you the steamer's name. It didn't seem to me important, and, in fact, as I've told you, I forgot it. I knew, of course, the details of my sister's escapade when she met you first, but the names of the boats never came into the tale; one was German and the other British, and that's all the details I got; and until you returned aboard here off that ghastly surf-boat, and scared us all out of our wits last night, she'd never had the curiosity to inquire the name of the ship my unlucky cousin had interested us in. It all sounds perfectly impossible, of course —"

"But as you know by this time," Miss Chesterman cut in, "what a dear old muddler my brother is over business matters, I'm sure you'll understand how it came about."

"Miss," said Captain Kettle, "and, sir, I'm grateful for what you say. I was a good deal upset last night. But I don't see that even if I'd known that it was the poor old *Towers* we were after it would have made any real difference. With the knowledge in my pocket I couldn't have looked for her more keenly, nor would

my duty to my owner have made me look less hard, and there you are. I should have taken on the billet just the same, and glad of it, even if you'd told me the old girl's name that first night at the Mason's Arms, back there in Foston. It's been a jar to find that my old sea-daddy's drowned, and me thinking him sailing the seas, with his false teeth in his chart-room drawer as merry as ever; but I guess sailors are paid to drown when necessary, and there, if you please, we'll leave it. Question is now, taking this steamboat in through those reefs. It's going to be a job and a half."

"Can't you manage it?"

"Sir, with respect, I can take any steamboat that's built through any channel where there's water enough to float her. But when I'm put to being my own pilot, I've got to survey the channel first."

"But surely you know the way now, after being in and out?"

"There's a vast of difference, miss, between dodging through in a rowboat that will float in two feet of water, and taking in a fine craft like this"— Captain Kettle cast his eye proudly over his small command —"that draws thirteen foot two. There must be a channel somewhere because, as you know, the old *Towers* blew in without touching. But the whole place is a regular stone-yard, and I tell you freely that how my surf-boat escaped getting smashed a good score of times beats all my experience."

"Is there such a thing as a tide here?"

"Water runs in places like a mill-race, sir."

"Presumbly the *Norman Towers* must have gone under, over, or through the reefs. Perhaps when my cousin was here it was the top of a spring tide that helped her over."

"That would help, of course. But my idea is there's a proper fairway, and there's nothing to do but take the ground, square by square, in that surf-boat, and plot out the whole scheme of the banks and reefs with as many cross-bearings as one can get. Then with some leading marks built ashore, and perhaps a buoy or two if the channels get very twisted, I'll be able, if the weather gives us a fair smooth sea, to take her in."

"And how long will this entertainment take?"

"A week, sir, at the very lowest estimate, and perhaps two if it breezes up again. If it comes to narrow soundings, a man can't get accurate depths when he doesn't know if the sea's lifting them a couple of fathoms above the normal, or dropping him twelve feet beneath it."

"Good lord, Skipper, you can't expect us to stay and be seasick here for another mortal week."

"I was going to say, sir, that we're low on coal, and have made a big hole in the water and stores. It would be best if you'd take the *Wangaroo* back to the islands for bunkers and provisions. You'll be back here again before I'm ready. And you'll find Mr. Trethewy a perfectly competent navigator, and you'll not miss the six men I want to keep."

"And leave you here to grill in that twopenny boat? My dear fellow, that comes inside the cruelty clause. We couldn't sleep for thinking of you. Don't you agree, Violet?"

"I shall take along a spare awning and a couple of spars to make a tent, and I marked down in my eye an island that's just the place for a camp. There didn't seem to be fuel, so we shall need a couple of bags of coal, but with those and rations we shall be comfortable enough till you return; and indeed, sir, if you come to think the business out, there's no other way for it."

So the scheme was agreed to, and Kettle fitted his boat, and went below to say good-by to Miss Dubbs before making his adieus to her employers on deck.

But that stately young person gave him a very chilly reception. She was vastly civil, one might almost say offensively so, but as far as a temperature of some eighty-three degrees Farenheit would permit, her conversation was ice.

A sentence or two passed before Captain Kettle observed this. As has been recorded before, their mode of addressing one another was always elegantly formal, and at first he thought that the lady's remarks were built on this model, and not studiously designed to denote offense.

But presently she left him beyond possible doubt as to her meaning.

"I would have you understand, Captain, that I am not your dear, or anything so familiar. To you, I am

either 'Miss Dubbs', or 'stewardess', whichever you prefer."

"I told you in Las Palmas harbor how awkward it would be if we were serving together on the same ship, and I was captain."

"You did, and it has been very awkward. I felt I intruded, though Miss Violet, to give her her due, never let me see she thought so. However, when the pair of you get back to the *Norman Towers* you will be able to renew old scenes."

"I might have told you before about meeting her out West," said Kettle miserably, "but I thought that was all passed and done with, and never expected to see her again. As you know, it was a perfect surprise to me, her coming to Grand Canary. You were a surprise, too, for that matter."

Miss Dubbs' elaborate black hair seemed fairly to bristle. "Ah, now we get to the truth, Captain. I was a surprise if you like. Plain, indeed, it was you didn't expect to see me, and you never disguised your disappointment. I was the little intruder, wasn't I? And you thought you were going to pick it up again with Miss Violet where you'd left it off, and play her the *Moonlight Sonata* on the accordion when Sir George was having his after-supper sleep? Oh, don't tell me. Haven't I seen you walking her out along the decks, and catching her by the elbow when she made believe she was losing her footing through the roll? Liver wing at dinner and, 'quartermaster, bring aft deck chair for Miss Chesterman'? That's

all right. That's her due. That's what you're paid for. But when it comes to pipe-claying her white shoes with your own fingers, that's the limit. It's no use denying it. I saw you at 'em through your own port-hole. Even a stewardess must come on deck sometimes."

"I deny nothing that I have done. I pipe-clayed the shoes because the steward can't do it decently, and won't learn. I'll clean yours, too, if you'll let me."

"No one touches my shoes but my husband, which is what you'll never be. Here's your engagement ring."

"You'd better keep it."

"If you'd prefer I should give it to the other girl instead of to you just say so. Pah!" said Miss Dubbs, swelling out her chest, "you can't think how I despise you, Captain. No, don't try to stop me; I'm going to my room."

It was then, with the dismal knowledge that the matter of his engagement had gone hopelessly awry, that Captain Kettle in a surf-boat laden with men, coal bags, meat tins, water beakers, biscuit sacks, rifles, rope, ammunition, canvas, sounding leads, and other cargo, put off from the *Wangaroo,* which forthwith turned her tail on him and steamed away to sea. Twelve very strenuous days passed over his head before he was able to rejoin her.

CHAPTER XII

A CHANNEL TO THE LAGOON

AFTER strenuous battling with seas flogged by the trade, the *Wangaroo* steamed up once more to her station off the African coast, and hooted impressively on her siren to announce arrival. That enormous siren, replacing one of the normal caliber for a seven-hundred-fifty-ton boat, was an extravagance which Captain Kettle almost coyly had wheedled out of the steamboat's canny owner before leaving the Tyne.

A stained red ensign on the top of a pole which was perched on the crown of a striped sand-dune blew out by way of answer, but the boat did not come out on that day or any of the three succeeding days. At intervals Miss Chesterman said she heard firing, but her brother, who prided himself on knowing a gunshot when he heard one, said that the noise was caused by the surf on the abounding reefs. The black-haired Miss Dubbs strained her eyes toward the shore till black shadows grew beneath them, but what opinions she had on the matter she kept to herself.

On the twelfth day the surf-boat came out, handled very dashingly under sail, ran with much smartness

alongside, and emitted a spruce and sun-scorched Captain Kettle.

After salutations had passed, a meeting was called in the privacy of the chart house.

"Miss," said the little sailor, "I'm free to own I'm sorry to see you. I've been hoping all these days you'd have stayed behind in Las Palmas. And now, sir, the best advice I can give is that we run back and leave Miss Violet where she ought to be."

"What's wrong with the *Norman Towers?*"

"Just this, sir. The Moors think she's their ship."

"And you're going to let it rest at that?"

Captain Kettle, as far as the action of the sun on his complexion would allow, flushed. "I thought, sir, you knew me better. The *Norman Towers* is your ship, and you're going to have her to realize on, as per contract, but there may possibly be a little trouble before we get her out, and I thought better that Miss Violet should be spared the seeing it."

"Danger, Captain, do you mean?"

"No, miss. I prefer to call it trouble."

"Well, if you're appealing to me, my answer is that I shan't go back. And if you're trying to influence my brother, he will tell you he's attempted ever since I was in short frocks to make me do as he liked, and has invariably failed. So unless you've other and stronger arguments to bring to bear, I'm afraid you must still continue to put up with me as a member of your crew. Stewardess, aren't I, by the way, the

same as Du—— on the same official footing, I mean, as Miss Dubbs?"

"I didn't see any other capacity under which to sign you on, miss. The Board of Trade is very strict in these matters, and if you don't conform in the proper way and put in the fool entries they want on the crew sheet, and can go to sleep over, there's a correspondence started that'll last a ship's master half a lifetime."

"Hadn't you better tell us exactly what you did find ashore?"

"That would be the best way, sir. Well, to begin with, what you see from here is not the coast, but a chain of small islands and reefs and sand-banks running along parallel to the edge of the mainland, sometimes a hundred yards away from it, sometimes two miles. The space between where we are now and the main opening is dotted with sand and lumps of stone just about as thick as the black squares on a draught-board, but not a bit regular. How the old *Towers* blew in there without touching — or, if she touched, without breaking up — is more than I can tell you. If I was an imaginative man I should say that the simplest explanation was that she grew wings and flew in over the top. As I'm not that, the only thing I can think of is, the Lord saw it was best for some one that she should get inside, and He sent a leading wind, and steered her in Himself. However, there she's got, and I must say that as far as the eye can tell she seems as sound as a bottle."

"But didn't you get on board to make a full examination?"

"I did not, miss, this time. The Moors had taken possession, and as there were at least six hundred of them on her decks when we hove in sight, and as I'd only six of a crew in the surf-boat, I concluded to leave them where they were for the time being."

"And they shot at you? There, George, I told you those were shots we heard."

"The *Norman Towers* has a couple of brass signal-guns, miss, and they must have brought some of their own powder on board, and used stone for shot. I suppose the noise and the powder smell pleased them, and the stones certainly didn't hit us, so all was well. If there'd been need, of course I should have gone on board, but as we were, so to speak, merely a reconnoitering expedition, and our job was to do a survey of the channel, I concluded to let them enjoy their war-dance in peace. All the same, I've got the idea there's a white man directing them."

"How's that?"

"They're showing more savvy than it's good for niggers to possess. And they're looking ahead, and that's a thing clear outside the ordinary colored man's contract. What do you suppose there would be on board that any Moor would care to loot? A few movables that would perhaps add up to five or six hundred pounds in value. And then when he'd got those, and started to break the port-hole glasses, and the gage glasses, and the few skylight glasses, and smash

the door panels out of sheer light-heartedness, and to throw overboard hatch covers and wheel gratings, and other trifles they didn't want, what would be the bill for damage to an old ore tramp like the *Norman Towers?* Call it another five hundred pounds. Well, and after that, and when they'd got tired of trampling mud off their splay toes into the saloon carpet, and had looked through the reserve coal bunker to make sure that wasn't the treasure room, what would be the next move? Go home with what they'd got, and swap lies about it round the kitchen fire? That would be the ordinary colored man's scheme of enjoyment. And if you asked him if he wouldn't take the steamer and her cargo along while he was there, he'd say he was much obliged, but really he'd got no immediate use for her. Do you follow my argument?"

"Yes, that seems all right. But aren't they doing as you say?"

"They're not, sir. They're arranging to hold the *Norman Towers* for keeps, and I tell you straight we're going to have a tough job in getting her away from them."

"But in wonder's name, what do they want her for?"

"That's what's bothering me, sir. That's why I seem to smell out the white man with the head-piece at the back of this pack of darkies, though even what his game is I can't guess. I tell you I'd be a lot easier if I could, because then one could fix up a plan to up-

set it, whereas as it is he's getting in all his moves undisturbed."

Sir George squared his big shoulders. "Can you get this boat in moderately close alongside?"

"Right up against her plates, if you want her there."

"Well, what's wrong with telling your beauties here with the rifles to pump lead into every one we see on the *Norman Towers'* deck till those that are left get sick of it and clear off? Then we proceed to make fast a tow-rope and pull her out, and so across to Las Palmas, where we sell her, for cash down, to some enterprising juggins who's in need of an antique steamboat and a cargo of copper concentrates, and live happily ever afterward on the proceeds. Sounds beautifully simple."

"Far too simple, sir," said the little sailor emphatically. "I'm just convinced that there's a bad snag waiting for us to run ourselves against it somewhere. And will you please tell me what's the meaning of this: they're quarrying."

"Quarrying what?"

"Stone as far as I could see. And it didn't look like a mine either. There was a great chocolate-colored slab of rock sticking up out of the beach just beyond where the *Towers* was lying, and they were as busy on it as a hive of bees. There must have been seven or eight hundred on that job, and they stuck to it like little men all the time daylight lasted. They'd

a night shift, too, because we heard them working, though how many there were on that it was too dark to see. Mark you, it wasn't work they were used to; they none of them seemed to have much skill in navvying; and though they'd got a heap of iron bars and shovels from the stoke-hold, they seemed to prefer gathering fallen stone from the screes, to splitting off fresh chunks from the face. Chocolate-colored stone it was; rummy-looking stuff."

"Perhaps it's iron ore and they're filling the *Towers* down to her marks with it, as a present to the salvors for their kindness in coming to remove the eyesore from the local landscape."

"Well, it might be iron ore, or copper, or gold, or just plain stone; I'm not a miner, and couldn't say; but they weren't making any attempt to bring it on board. They were simply piling it in heaps along the beach."

"Did they look as if they were building a fort with it?"

"I thought of that, but couldn't see a trace of it. If they'd intended putting up a building, one thinks they'd have piled their heaps four-square, so as to be handy for the masons. But there was no arrangement like that. The heaps were, as I've said, all strung out in a line along the beach behind the *Norman Towers,* and there was no attempt at sorting out the stone, or squaring up the chunks. They might have been dumped there for road making."

Sir George Chesterman was impressed. "Violet, I wish to heaven you were back at Las Palmas."

"And I'm devoutly glad I'm not. Do you think I'm not curious, too?"

"Oh, I'll admit your curiosity. But I'm getting to be of Captain Kettle's opinion: the one thing we are reasonably sure of arriving at out of all this, is the unexpected. He said those fellows were as busy as a hive of bees. It will probably occur to your wisdom that bees sometimes sting, and when they do they can be disgustingly dangerous. I remember once, when you were a small child, you must needs stir up a hive in the Hall garden with a walking-stick. I remember the way you got stung about the legs. Remarkably fine pair of legs, too, you had at that time."

"As I have now, and as they suit me down to the ground you needn't refer to them further. But if you know bees are going to sting, it's very easy to take precautions, and then they can't get at you."

"I tried being a bee master once," said Sir George, pulling the big retriever's ear.

"Ah, sir, I envy you there. I always hope to retire from the sea some day and take up a country life."

"Then you take my tip and let bees alone. I always preferred to let the other expert handle them after I'd made the first few attempts."

"I think it would be most comfortable, sir, if you'd allow me just to run you and the ladies back to Las Palmas first before we tackled the job."

Sir George Chesterman lay back in his chair and laughed. "My good Skipper," he said, "you're dangling the bait of a real lively new sensation before my

nose, and then you propose to whisk it away, and put me back again in cotton wool. Oh, Diamond, Diamond, you little know what you have done."

Captain Kettle pulled rather nervously at his red beard. "Then am I to understand, sir, that you —"

"I'm here to watch this business put through, and to help as far as I can. You're the better man of the two, Captain, in every way, and you are in command now and I wish you to remain in command. I here and now resign my billet of idle passenger and critic of cocktails. I ask to serve under you, and am ready to take up any job you think I'm capable of, from personal aide-de-camp down to assistant cook. Miss Chesterman also, if I know anything about her, will do every ounce she can, and if, unfortunately, any one gets hurt, well I believe she once picked up some hospital training the month she tired of the sensation of being sweet on a doctor. The ship and all that's inside her is at your entire disposal, and if you want another ship and more men, say the word, and I'll get them for you. I'd no idea when I left England we were going to come up against what looks uncommonly like a private war, but, by God, now we're in for it I'm going to see it through."

"The blood of the Chestermans is evidently stirred," said Violet. "I call upon you all to hear me deliberately utter the word Hooroo. Captain Kettle, I echo my newly awakened brother's words. I am yours to command."

"Sir and miss," said the little sailor, "you shall never regret the confidence shown in me, and I'll pull that steamboat out, if I have to murder half the niggers in Africa to get her clear. It's not business, of course, to say such a thing, but a job like this always comes in sweeter to one when it turns out a lot harder than one had any decent reason to expect. I tell you there were nights in the surf-boat when we crept in to see what they were up to, when I could have sung to think what a hard nut that white man ashore was baking for me to crack."

"But I thought you were to make a camp on one of the islets, and sleep in a tent?"

"That was the scheme, miss, but you see with these Moors all over the place it occurred to me that they could either swim or raft themselves across to the islands at the other side of the lagoon if they felt that way inclined, and it's unpleasant having one's sleep disturbed. So we lived it out in the boat, and the watch below had the floor boards. Those bags of coal weren't wasted either. We used them as anchors for three of our mark buoys. You see, I didn't think it was worth while to go ashore and build those leading marks I spoke about, because it was as likely as not with a smart white man to put them up to it, the Moors would pull them down and build them in other spots, so that any one relying on them to run in by would pile up his ship on some reef he'd calculated to avoid. You see, the trouble about the shore over yonder is

that it's all made to a pattern, with no outstanding features that one can pick up to base a bearing on."

"But you took no stove on the boat. How did you cook?"

"We didn't. We just ate our tucker as it came, and were glad it was there. But I must say the hands did get riled with one thing, and that was the gulls. The gulls on this station had evidently not seen a boat before, and they thought we were in trouble, and would presently be chop for them; and they followed us day and night with their tired flap-flapping, or else swimming beside the boat, never winking, never sleeping, till the hands began to lose temper and want to use their rifles. Of course, I wasn't going to let them waste your cartridges, sir, for a matter of sentiment, and told them that if they kept alive, which was what they were paid for, the birds wouldn't want to pick their eyes out. But I never could get them to see it that way, and just to show you how unreasonable hands are with an officer, I may say that I've had to attend to every one of my six — and most of them more than once — just because they were scared at seeing those birds always there, and always staring at them with those shiny unwinking eyes."

A fireman came up: "Chief engineer wishes me to tell you, sir, he's got steam for eight knots."

"Right," said Captain Kettle. "Then, as all is settled, sir and miss, I'll take her in at once."

There is a much-abused term that one often hears applied to mariners that such an one is a "daring sea-

man". It would pain me to see that label put to Captain Kettle. Plucky he was to the ends of his fingers, and resourceful, and skilful, and when nothing else would serve, reckless. But he was never a man to take risks with any vessel under his command, when those risks could be legitimately avoided.

He knew the capabilities of the *Wangaroo* to the last ounce. Under his command she had been tuned up among other things to give a full knot more speed than she had logged in coming down the North Sea. Yet (thanks to the genius of her designer) she was probably the unhandiest little thing of her size afloat, and there was no getting over the fact of those unpremeditated sheers out of her course. When the whim seized her, and from no other ascertainable cause, she would at intervals, and without the slightest warning, take a sudden lunge to starboard from which no amount of helm would steady her until she had had her fling. The which was an uncomfortable habit when one was navigating her down a narrow fairway.

The run inshore was unnerving enough to the spectator. There was a moderate swell running, and though the bottle-green water did not break unless it was especially irritated, here and there little annular gardens of surf spoke of dangers out of sight.

As they drew nearer the shore, and rose them to the eye, many of the reefs protruded, and the passage grew more and more ugly. Dog teeth of rock suddenly bit their way through smooth oily surfaces

of the water, and as suddenly were sheathed, and in other places smooth whale-backs of sand were for a moment uplifted and as quickly eclipsed.

"It isn't what you see in this beastly channel," Sir George muttered to his sister, "as what you don't see, that make the real dangers."

"It's a regular maze," Violet agreed. "I can't think how any one can thread it. What would happen, do you suppose, if we touched?"

"The odds are, I should say, the swell would break her back within five minutes, and we should either have to try the hotels on shore, or try a cruise in the boats. Beginning to be sorry you came, old lady?"

"I wouldn't miss it for a new set of furs. But if we're anxious, what must any one responsible be?"

"If you mean the skipper, I've just walked forrard till I could get a look up at him. He's stuck there on the upper bridge looking like a graven image. The man at the wheel's got his eyes about a foot out of his head, and that fellow Smith that he's given brevet rank to as third mate, is hanging on to the engine-room telegraph as though it was the only friend he'd left on earth. I took a look down the engine-room skylight as I passed, and saw the old chief caressing the throttle with his own fair fingers, and the great McTodd in pairson standing by the reversing gear. Oh! I tell you, Violet, everybody's quite up to the importance of what's going on, and ready to do every inch he knows if he's called upon. Great Scot! what's

that? Pooh, it was only the backwash of that surf hitting her. By the way the old tub trembled, I thought she'd bumped on a rock."

In and out, first to starboard and then to port, the *Wangaroo* was danced, as the record of the hidden channel unreeled itself from Captain Kettle's brain, and was transmitted per orders and human hands to the powers that governed her. Twice an angle was too acute for her to turn in her stride, and Kettle had to send her hard astern on a reversed helm to get her round.

And up one narrow zigzag he backed boldly for a whole half-mile, with only a narrow canal of deep water to allow for mistakes, and spouting reefs on either beam ready to account for the smallest error of judgment or performance. But still I object to the word daring. It was merely an exhibition of iron nerve accompanied by perfect skill.

The water grew smoother as they crept inside the shelter of the outer reefs, and the channel grew more intricate.

"I swear no steamboat could have dodged in here," said Sir George, after Kettle had taken the *Wangaroo* through a particularly intricate figure of eight, "without engines and a human crew to help her."

"The answer to that statement is that she did," retorted his sister. "What I can't understand is how any man can store up in his head all these little bits of distances, and changes of course, without a mark to help him except those half-dozen trumpery buoys,

and with prompt shipwreck as a penalty for the least mistake."

"To which I remark," was the brotherly reply, "that your own pet idol is doing it this minute before your very attractive eyes, so don't talk rot. Don't you think you'd better go below and get the steward to give you a cup of tea?"

"I do not in the least. But I suppose that's an intimation that you think we're getting to the end of the trip, and that once round the corner our African brothers may shoot at us."

"Yes — by gad, though, Violet, I didn't know we were so close. There's the *Norman Towers* opening out from behind that bluff. Did you ever see anything coated with a more flawless coat of rust? By gad, look out!"

Instinctively Sir George stepped in front of his sister, who just as instinctively took hold of his loose, baggy, old shooting-coat by the rear to drag him aside.

Then there came to them the shattering roar of a brass gun, loaded with black powder, and fired at close quarters, the crash of a stone shot impacting on iron plates, and presently the tinkle of the gravel to which the shot had been reduced, dropping down upon their heads and into the water alongside, in a miniature hail-storm.

Sir George glanced up at the upper bridge. The little sailor, binoculars in hand, cold cigar between his teeth, was standing there unruffled, and fully occupied in his pilotage.

CHAPTER XIII

SAINT M. BERGASH, B.A.

SIR GEORGE CHESTERMAN put down the glasses and relighted his pipe. "I'm hanged if I can make out those heaps of chocolate-colored stone you told us about, Skipper. There's the cliff all right that you said they were quarrying from, but the shore below it is swept as clean as the floor of a ball-room."

"Yes, sir. That's one of the things that's bothering me a good deal."

"And I suppose the other is: Where have our dusky friends all bolted to? They bang off their tin cannon at us just as might have been expected, and then, instead of putting up the battle which one might reasonably suppose ought to follow, they calmly vanish. D'you suppose they're just lying doggo under decks till we are kind enough to call?"

"It's possible, sir."

"With their pockets full of paving stones, the aforesaid, to fire at us when we pull alongside? By the way, could they have pocketed all the stone you saw?"

"No, sir, certainly not. There must have been thousands of tons of it. They were working, working, working day after day, many hundreds of them.

Indeed, the more I think of it the more I am convinced the heaps didn't grow as they ought to have done."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"It almost seems as if they must have been carting it away under cover of night while we were hanging about here in the surf-boat, and then as soon as our backs are turned, off goes the rest of it. As you say, sir, the beach now is swept as clear as a chapel floor over all the space behind the *Towers* and up to the foot of the cliff."

"Well," said Sir George, "they can't have evaporated into thin air, all of them. Suppose we just sit down and smoke for half an hour, and see if we can't spot some one peeping at us either from the steamer or behind some bit of cover on the land side."

"With ladies to take care of here on board," said Captain Kettle with a sigh, "that's the best thing we can do. We must move very cautious. We can't afford to take the usual men's risks."

So they set to work with binoculars and telescopes to search for what they could find.

On the Atlantic side the scheme of the land and seascape was simple enough. There was a long straggling row of reefs and islets, noisy on the outer edges with a white frill of surf, and apparently tenanted only by sea-fowl. A Moor or two might certainly have been hidden in unseen folds of the larger dunes, but the mode of their ferriage across the lagoon was not apparent, and it was hardly likely they

would have cut themselves adrift from any possible base.

Africa on the other side of the lagoon presented in that latitude an edge as straight as if it had been ruled, with the one exception of a small curved peninsula like a human fist and arm, mainly of chocolate-colored rock, which was thrust out into the lagoon, and in the hollow of this, the crook of the arm, so to speak, the *Norman Towers* was harbored. Beyond the straight edge of the hot yellow beach lay dunes of sand which bristled here and there with clumps of dry gray grass.

"I can see birds running in and out of those grass tufts," said Kettle, peering through his long old-fashioned ship's telescope. "They don't seem worried. They aren't attempting to fly. That shows there's no men about."

"Here's where I come in," said Sir George with a a laugh. "Those are Barbary partridge, and about the most unsporting game bird to shoot at on the face of Africa. You have almost to kick them up before they'll rise to be comfortably shot. Try further, Skipper."

The heads of live-oaks and argan-trees showed beyond the dunes, stretching over a wide flat, and then there were scrub-clad foot-hills, and then steeper slopes that ran back into colossal mountains.

"The Atlas, I suppose, those big lumps at the back," said Sir George.

"Don't know, sir. I'm a sailor, and my geography doesn't go inland past the beach."

"I think all the big mountains that run out to the Atlantic about here belong to the Atlas range, or one of its spurs. Is that cloud up at the top there, do you suppose, or snow?"

"It might be either."

"And there may be villages to any extent, or even towns for that matter, tucked away out of our sight in the valleys and folds of that range, and we should be none the wiser. I'm afraid, Skipper, we can't trace the barracks of your black regiment by merely staring at the country-side."

"Just take a line, sir, please, over that palm tree with the stem like a catapult. D'ye call that blue haze just a bit of heat mist, or is it cooking smoke?"

The sailor stared, and his employer stared, and again they decided that it might be either.

"If you very knowing people," said Violet Chesterman, "will bring your eyes nearer home and take a look at the partridges again, you'll see they're all tending to run one way, and that's north. And those dotty little things among them are quail, I suppose."

"And by gad, Skipper, look there, did you see that? And he was heading north, too."

"I saw a big animal, sir."

"Moroccan wild boar, and bolting like a good-un, wasn't he? Now his eminence, the pig, doesn't run out of the way of one man, nor, if he's that way out, will he sometimes shift for forty. I should say there's distinct reason to expect visitors presently down at the southern end of the beach there."

"That's at the back of the *Norman Towers,* sir, where they were before. Almost looks as if the first comers had padded a good hard road to that point, and late callers stick to the same track. Well, it will simplify matters if they make a rule of that."

"The range from here to there is — say, four hundred and fifty — or perhaps five hundred yards. Shooting will be a bit difficult across sand in this heat, because of the refraction, but we ought to get on to the target after a shot or two. What do you say if we point out when they begin to arrive that we regard this section of the continent as part of the British Empire, and that this isn't our at-home day?"

"I want you to remember, sir, as I'm remembering," said Captain Kettle patiently, "that we've got ladies on board and can't afford to make mistakes. I know it means we shall miss some fun. But I want them to be allowed to make the first moves."

"Then," said Sir George, "that puts my rifle out of action for the time being, and, by the speaker's eye, there's the mark!"

There cantered out from behind the shoulder of a dune, twenty splendid barbaric cavalrymen. Of the two who rode first, one, obviously an inferior, carried a white napkin blowing out from the end of his long gun-barrel, and the other alongside him was in command. They halted, and for a moment regarded the rusting *Norman Towers.* Captain Kettle with some quick instinct of defiance (in spite of the words he had just uttered) laid hold of the *Wangaroo's* siren

string, and after a preliminary cough or two, to clear its throat, blew out a deep sonorous blast. The troop leader turned to his men, and through the glasses Sir George could see him laugh. Then he touched his horse with the sharp corners of his stirrup-irons, and galloped north up the beach alone, without flag of truce, without escort.

Abreast of the *Wangaroo* he reined up, and his black stallion stood with forefeet at the water's edge, and hind hoofs straddled out backward, as though it had been trained for the show ring. The rider brought up a hand to his head-gear in salute, dropped it, dropped his reins, and sat there under the sunshine like a man carved out of iron.

"Wants to talk, I guess," said Captain Kettle. "I wonder what's his little game. Doesn't seem to have any idea we might shoot him either."

"Well, you can't bawl at him across this distance. Besides, it's too hot for shouting. It would be interesting to hear what he's got to say. I lay a pound to a brick he'll start to prove that he's got no connection with the other darkies who whanged at us with the brass gun."

"He's a very splendid-looking man," said Violet from behind a pair of binoculars. "And, anyway, there's only one of him, so you needn't be afraid."

"Yes, I'm afraid all right, miss," said Captain Kettle grimly. "But we'll interview the gentleman for all that, if we can rake up any language among us that the other can understand. Mr. Smith?"

"Sir?"

"Call away that port quarter-boat, and fetch off that man from the beach."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"During the interval, Captain, let me give you a cup of tea," said Violet. "The steward makes it himself now, so I can guarantee it's not been boiled more than half an hour. You needn't look anxious, George. That's an ambassador on the beach there, and while negotiations last there'll be a truce. Afterward it may possibly be 'battle continued'. So let's drink tea while we may, and be thankful for the cook's new biscuit."

It was on this domestic scene that the ambassador's eye first fell when he came up over the side. Captain Owen Kettle, as the complete ship captain, went to meet him, with his best air, and his best Arabic.

"*Slamma,*" said Kettle.

"*Aleikoom slamma,*" said the visitor.

Captain Kettle reeled off a sentence or two to the effect that the day was fine, hospitality was waiting, and Allah was in His Heaven. In the original it was a fine sonorous phrase, but as the little sailor had picked it up from the Mecca pilgrim touts in Jeddah, half the words were very much debased Arabic, and the rest were made up of assorted unknown dialects.

However, it was all one to the visitor. He laughed and shook his head. "I'm sorry," said he, in English, "but I am a poor linguist. I didn't know you were Portuguese."

"By James!" thundered Captain Kettle, "if any man takes me for less than I am I'll kill him. And so you speak English?"

The visitor lifted his eyebrows. "I really don't see why not. I know you islanders think you monopolize the whole earth, but I never knew that you objected to share out your language."

The man spoke with a quiet educated voice, without effort and without accent. By this time the other two at the tea-table had got over their first surprise, and Sir George got up and walked across.

"I'm sure," he said, "you'll pardon Captain Kettle's natural surprise. But really you look the Moor to the life in that kit, and any one might make a mistake. My name's Chesterman. Will you come and be introduced to my sister and have some tea?"

The visitor bowed. He had just the knack of an English gentleman's bow, not too much, not too stiff, and not in any way to be mistaken for the bow of other nations. And then he sat himself and his white draperies very comfortably in a big Madeira chair, and crossed his red leather riding-boots and took up the cup that was offered him.

"The taste of this will come back like an old memory," said he. "We use green tea, you know, down here, and take it with green mint and a lot of sugar."

"I tried it once in Tangier," said Violet. "We ran over there for the day from Gibraltar. I don't think I could ever get used to it. Have you really come to like it?"

"I was brought up to the taste, you see."

"Then have you been out here a long time?"

"Ever since I came down from Cambridge, with an interlude once of a week also in Gibraltar. I took a pony over there to race."

"Then have you — I mean are you —" the usually glib Miss Chesterman was at a loss for a way to put it. It dawned on her that this visitor in the Moorish clothes, head-gear bound round with camel's-hair rope, gold-sheathed hooked dagger hung over one shoulder, gold mounted pistol over the other, this man from the interior of Africa was English. Come to notice him more closely, his hair and his beard were brown, and his eyes were blue; and, though his complexion was somewhat dark, that, of course, was the sun. And, anyway, many Southern Europeans were far darker than he. He was an Englishman and a Cambridge man, and he had kicked over the traces somehow at home and discreetly vanished into the mysteries of Africa. Those, it flashed across her, were the outstanding points of his biography. "Do you like the country in there?" she asked as a compromise.

"It has its points. But then, perhaps, I'm prejudiced. You see, I am used to it."

"I said," put in Captain Kettle pointedly, "from the very first moment I saw the way those niggers were being handled on the *Norman Towers* that there was a white man in it at the back of this business somewhere."

"So?" said the visitor with polite indifference.

"I was up at Cambridge," said Sir George. "Clare was my shop. But I should be a lot senior to you," and he mentioned his year.

"By Jove!" said the visitor, "that's a queer coincidence. I was next door to you, at the Hall. But I didn't go up till two years after you came down. Funny place, Cambridge. I took up Arabic for my special, and they plowed me and mainly on my accent, too, I'll trouble you. But I stuck to it, and got a B.A. all right — took pol, econ. Lord, I wonder what it would feel like going back to take one's Master's."

"I can tell you. I took mine. You meet only gyps and tradespeople and bedmakers that you know, and you wonder why the dons are all so dirty, and the undergraduates are all such babes. The only decent man I met up there that I'd known before was old Heber, the pawnbroker. I took him to the Bull and dined him, and he gave me all the news."

"I've often regretted," said the visitor, "that I never pawned anything when I was in England, so that I could look back and know how it was done. Going to a pawnbroker's when I was at Charterhouse was, for some reason or other, considered bad form. They were awfully narrow in some ways. And I'm afraid some of the Charterhouse superstitions stuck to me even after I'd rubbed about at the Hall."

"All the public schools have their fads," Sir George admitted. "That's why we pay two hundred pounds

a year for the privilege of going to them. So you were at Charterhouse? I wonder if you were there with my cousin Fred?"

"Fred Chesterman? I should think I was. Not that I knew him. He was a big chap in the sixth when I was a wretched little shaver at the bottom end of the lower school. But he was a great god of mine. He was the school soccer captain my first year, and fired me with ambition to play association foot-ball. I didn't do so badly either; got into the school team, and played for the Hall for the matter of that, though they were no good; but I never managed to get my blue, which was the real thing I was keen on. Sorry, Miss Chesterman, for boring you with all this schoolboy shop. But I haven't had a chance of letting out for a lot of years, and, really, your brother led me on."

"I beg your pardon," said Captain Kettle, "but were you born in England?"

"I was not. Clare did a big line in cricket, if I remember my records right, about the time you were up."

"I think Clare's always been a big cricket and rugger college," said Sir George, "just the same as the Hall put in most of its time at the boats. Rowing was my line, though, and that is the reason, I suppose, why I've rather run to flesh. That's the usual fate of the rowing man when he comes down."

Away they went once more on Cambridge shop, Violet putting in her word now and then, and Captain Kettle, who felt outside this circle, trying his best not

to glower too openly. The little sailor, it must be remembered, was holding his first command, and the weight of it rode heavily on him; but always throughout his life it is on record that the business of his owners came first, and social pleasures a bad second. This easy-mannered visitor was, in Kettle's opinion, a good deal too clever in his conversation to be entirely wholesome, and, in fact, he had felt a natural antagonism toward him from the first moment of the man's stepping on board. If he had had only his own sentiments to consider, he would have thrown him neck and crop over the side. But, as it was, in his own phrase he felt himself in a clove-hitch. The policy that he himself felt to be for his owner's good was exactly opposed to the policy that the owner was obviously prepared to take, and Kettle felt that never was young shipmaster on the horns of a more cruel dilemma.

But at the risk of offending, Captain Kettle doggedly followed up his points when he saw a chance.

"Have you lived here a long time?" he asked when the next lull came.

"Some people might call it long," the visitor replied with easy indifference, and went on to discuss with Sir George the nice point of introducing Hungarian partridges to stir up the local Barbary bird.

"Of course, it's a toss-up if they'd cross," said Sir George.

"And I should make myself very unpopular with my neighbors if I produced a fowl that could fly.

The sportsman hereabouts goes out with a gun six feet long, and waits half a day till he gets three partridges in a row on the ground, and then lets drive at them. You see the breech-loading shot-gun isn't a common object of the country-side in this part of the world. In fact, my own are probably the only pair of twelve-bore ejectors in this part of Africa. Purdy built them for me before I came out, and I tell you I had a very awkward job of it smuggling them into the country, in spite of the fact that I've got, of course, a bit of personal pull."

"The worst of buying those Hungarian partridge eggs is that I believe fully ninety per cent. of them are poached," remarked Sir George.

"Then, if that's the case, the experiment as far as I'm concerned must drop. We're a pretty lawless crew out here over game laws, but if one hears of a man preserving, whether it's in Hungary or in Norfolk, one naturally feels bound in common decency to back him up. But I suppose one could get eggs legitimately produced on a proper game farm if one was prepared to pay for them."

"Certainly. Of course, pheasant's eggs are their principal product at those places. By the way, why not try pheasants? You've plenty of cover, and, if the partridges can find food, they should, too. You ought to get fine rocketing shots if you had rides cut in the proper places among some of those steep woods."

The visitor laughed and stretched out his hands.

He had small and beautifully-shaped hands, and they were very carefully kept.

"You must remember we're rather out of the world down here, and there's a good lump of the Atlas and a number of very unfriendly people between here and Mogador, which is our nearest steamer port. I have tried importing pheasant's eggs there several times, as it happens. I calculated the date the boat would arrive, and had relays of men strung out between here and there to run them along without delay; but as each time the experiment has been a fizzle, one gets a bit discouraged. You see, it takes a couple of hundred men and a good deal of organization to string out one's line of runners."

Sir George Chesterman stared. This broken-down university man, whom he was prepared rather to pity and was open to help, was evidently a person of some considerable local position. He had not spoken in the least boastfully; in fact, the egg tale had been told with the humorous touch that a man usually does give to a story that is told against himself. What on earth could be his history?

Captain Kettle took advantage of the lull, and followed his subject doggedly.

"Then one might take it you lived here?"

"One might."— The words were a trifle offensive, but a smile took the edge from them.

"A local landowner, in fact?"

"Oh, I think I am."

Captain Kettle could have shaken Sir George and

Miss Chesterman just then. Why did they not back him up in his search for sound information, instead of turning the conversation back again to what (he considered) were further inanities?

"I suppose you brew your own powder and make your own shot here up-country?" asked Sir George.

"Most of them do. All the big tribes in Atlas have their own powder mills, and when we run out of bullets, we mine lead and do a bit of smelting. But for Winchesters we import cartridges, and I'm afraid I'm extravagant enough to do the same for my shot-gun ammunition. Kynochs would probably be surprised to know that their cartridges cost about eighteen pence apiece by the time they reach me here. But then, of course, you jealous nations outside are to blame. You put up an absurd interfering law making it an offense to import Arms of Precision into this part of Africa, and as you have your warships to back you up, and we are not naval folks, cartridges cost us about seven pounds a hundred instead of some ten shillings. But, of course, we get them all the same if we like to pay."

"You take it easily. It's that small item of paying that makes things so hard for some of us."

The visitor laughed. "I apologize. I should have remembered. Here for — well, for us — you see, it's only a case of sending out a handful of one's men to do a bit of mining, and the gold slugs trickle out to the coast and come back as coin. We don't show riches in this country; it's not particularly safe to do

that; but it's quite as well to have them within reach, as I suppose it is all the world over."

"Then if you're a well-off man," said Captain Kettle acidly, "may I ask what you are after the *Norman Towers* for?"

This time there was no doubt about the visitor's dislike. Hate for an instant gleamed out of his blue eyes, and was as quickly veiled. But he did not pretend to infuse cordiality into his voice.

"My good Captain Whatever-your-name-is, I don't want your wreck. And, by the way, now we are on the subject, you might kindly tell me, is she yours?"

"My owner has bought all the rights in her from Lloyds."

"Ah, Lloyds! An eminent corporation in London, I believe? Then you had better get Lloyds to give you delivery of your bargain."

"Won't you?"

"I? What on earth have I to do with it? I'll give you a piece of local information, if you like, not that I imagine for a moment that it will satisfy you. The law of Lloyds, for anything I know, travels over the seas that Lloyds control. But their writ's not current here, and local custom has a different law. Local custom, here, south of the Atlas, says that jetsam on any beach belongs to the beach's owner."

"You can't uphold such a rule?"

The visitor shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly. At any rate, I'm not going to try. You say she's your steamer. In that case you'd better take her away —

if you can. She doesn't interest me, and I'm not going to burn my fingers over your affairs. Why, who is —"

The visitor stood to his feet and bowed, and turned down his glance. Miss Dubbs had come on deck, handsome in face, opulent in hair and figure.

"You!" said Miss Dubbs.

The visitor looked up quickly but was plainly puzzled. "I'm afraid I've forgotten, madam."

"I should never forget your eyes, though I was only a little girl at the time, Mr. Bergash. Perhaps you'll remember me when I tell you I put sticking-plaster on your face where you cut it after your bicycle threw you into father's front gate. You've got the scar still there over the cheek-bone, I see. And what of the other gentleman who called you 'Saint'?"

"Oh, he's come to a bad end! He's an attaché at one of the fashionable British embassies somewhere in Europe." He turned to the others. "Perhaps I'd better introduce myself. I'm Sidi Mohammed Bergash. I can't help the saintship," he added whimsically. "That descended to me."

"Then you're a Moorish chief — or shaick — or whatever you call it?"

"No, sir. Very much the reverse. I'm a Berber, as my fathers have been for a matter of three thousand years, in spite of various attempts by Romans, and Saracens, and Moors, and these parvenu nations to conquer us. And I'm kaid of that country up there in those mountains."

CHAPTER XIV

A FOOT-NOTE TO HISTORY

I BELIEVE that the Republic of Marina in North Italy, and the somewhat squalid Republic of Andorre in the Pyrenees, make the proud boast that they have never been conquered. Discourteous people might point out that there is nothing in either of them to attract the appetite of a conqueror. Thibet, of course, has suffered a downfall, and the North Pole is under suspicion. So the Mayan section of Yucatan and the Berber villages of the Western Atlas remain the only countries of the world to-day worthy of envy that have not been polluted by the foot of the invader.

All modern rulers of Mexico from Don Hernando Cortez to Don Porfirio Diaz have tried to annex the interior of Yucatan — and failed; and throughout all the ages, all the successive powers from the Romans to the present Moors who have held Morocco have been similarly unsuccessful in their attacks upon the Berber strongholds in the Atlas mountains. It argues, if one comes to think of it, some particular trait of strength which keeps these two small districts alone of all the vast acreage of the globe unexplored by the pushing white man, unannexed by some other hungry

nation, undisturbed by that standard which other people have been pleased to set up as civilization.

Old Kaid Bergash (father of the man Captain Kettle disliked so keenly on first sight) was a tough old warrior who ruled his tribe with a rod of iron, and was an authority on tradition. He lived in a stone castle built on an almost inaccessible spur of the Atlas, and his tribe lived there with him, and within its walls stored all their principal gear and worldly goods. The castle's ground space inside the walls measured barely an acre and a half, so that when a man or a family needed more house-room they built a story on to their existing dwelling. Some of these huddled sky-scrapers towered as much as five stories above ground level. But that was the limit. One or two ambitious architects had tried for greater heights and had brought their whole structure crumbling in ruin. At least there was a tradition that this had happened in the year A. D. 1492 when the Moors of the Moroccan lowlands were busy in Spain, and the Berber increase was not kept within reasonable limits by war.

Below the surface of the rock, great hollows had been dug out in very early days for grain and water storage, and the fact that the tribal flocks and herds were stabled in the ground floor of the houses above, and gave the water a good ammoniacal flavor, was not a trifle to disturb a Berber palate. And, anyway, the tribe had flourished on the arrangement for a matter of some three thousand years.

The engineer of these caverns was a sapper who had served his time as a mercenary of Carthage, and, except that he seems to have run to a taste for heavy bronze doors and lids to his bins, he appears to have done his work efficiently and well. He was an expert on sieges, and laid down the law that there should always be kept in store four years' corn, three years' forage for the animals, and six years' water; which provision has proved efficient on many historical occasions, and is accordingly maintained to-day. There is also a well in the middle of the castle, which has been dug down through the rock during sieges — the sinking was spread over four hundred years — and after the first four hundred feet it goes down in inclines set spiralwise round a solid central core.

But as they had to drive downward a matter of twelve hundred and fifty feet before they struck water, and the air down there is very bad, the well is only looked on as an additional guarantee, and is in reality never used except in moments of very great hardship.

On three sides of the castle the rock drops practically sheer into the valley, which is a trifle of twelve hundred feet below. I fancy there must have been a few projections once, but those stout-hearted old fellows at the back of time who built the place must have slung one another with rawhide ropes down the face of the precipice, and chipped, and drilled, and quarried with their bronze tools till all possible footholds dropped down below. Afterward they squared

the bits and carried them up to the top again, round by the path, to use as building material.

There was nothing Carthaginian, or for that matter African, about the building of their outer wall. That had quite the Roman touch. It was eight to ten feet thick, all of tooled stone, with no rubble packing, and all held together by a mortar that was a good deal harder than the stone itself. The one gateway, on the causeway side, was just wide enough to admit a gravid cow, and no wider, and the height of a camel's hump. The dwelling-houses for man and beast inside were less pretentious. They had not been built for eternity, and after the fashion set by the Pharaohs, the Jews, and the Carthaginians for domestic buildings, were for the most part constructed of adobe, which is quite good for, say, three hundred years or so, if only you keep the weather out by a good outside skin of plaster.

The causeway, too, which was the only road by which one could get into the castle, was quite a notable feature in its way. Originally it had been part of the spur on which the castle was perched, but it had been shaved down the sides here, and built up at the edge there, obviously on some Roman or Carthaginian model, till to-day it looks like an aqueduct such as one may see, for example, near Tunis, only with the arches filled, and with men and animals instead of water coursing along the gutter at its top.

Two cows abreast can get along that causeway, if they are not fat cows; or two horsemen, if they

crook up their outside legs so as not to interfere with the parapet; or three footmen, if the middle man does not swing out his elbows. The length of it from the little gateway in the big wall to where it fans out into bare hillside is some two hundred and fifty to two hundred and eighty yards, and the drop over the parapet averages anything between fifty and ninety feet sheer.

Furthermore, it is an exception to all modern Moroccan rules of architecture, in that it is kept in excellent repair. In modern times — say, since A. D. 745 — the Berbers have grafted a not very rigid Mohammedism on the assorted brands of paganism which their mercenaries down through the former ages brought home with other loot. They admit in theory that every man's fate is written on his forehead, and that what Allah has ordained will come to pass. But they maintain that Allah writes the choicest things for those who help themselves, and so they keep their defenses efficient, and they discourage the intruder.

Now Sidi Ibrahim Bergash (of pious memory) had one wife who occupied all of his tender affections, and as she continued at decent intervals to bear him sons, he took no other. During the years he ruled over the castle and the tribe, seed-time came at its appointed periods, and harvests followed. One year in twenty came the blight, which was bad; one year in fifteen the locusts, which were worse; and one year in ten the sultan, who was worst of the lot.

It was the sultan's habit to camp an army among the corn-fields in the valley, and, if not bought off, to ravage that valley down to the last blade of corn and the last straying goat. He could not smoke or shoot the Berbers out of their castle because it was too strong, and the Berbers could not cup up his army because it was too big, and although the residents did creep out at night-time and try a little snipping, two can play at that game, and the sultan's men, besides being clever soldiers, had such an extremely bad time of it in this world that they were indecently anxious to be sent to Paradise, and in consequence inconveniently reckless.

So that, on the whole, it was only the younger and rasher spirits among the Berbers who tried much retaliation, and the elders, with households to provide for, generally found it profitable to pay enough taxes to buy off the rest of their crops. But be it clearly understood they did not one little bit like paying, and never accounted themselves the sultan's subjects or even his vassals.

Slings, the long-bow and the cross-bow had from time immemorial been the Berbers' missile-throwers, though, like the Baleares, they had always had, and have to-day for that matter, a weakness for the sling. Black powder and the short-stocked gun with a five-foot barrel have crept among them these latter years, but owing to their inefficiency and the difficulty of coming by them, have achieved no vast popularity.

It remained for Saint Ibrahim to discover and lust after the rifle.

His holiness, as it happened, was one day at the northern edge of his marches, where the Atlas foothills curve out into the plain, and the temperate climate of the mountain verges into a tropical heat. He was over on that side on the matter of a cohort of wild pig raiding among some of the tribal corn and being a keen sportsman, and finding the pig plentiful, stayed down there a whole week, and slew fourteen fine boars to his own spear (whereof, the tusks by the way, remain as hat pegs in a set of rooms in Trinity Hall to this day).

Upon this innocent amusement there descended without warning the advance scouts of a sultan's army, and the sportsmen and beaters ran or rode for their lives in fourteen different directions. Three beaters and a cousin of the kaid's were captured, and his highness the sultan, with that paternal care for his people for which he was noted, and which so endeared him to them, cut off the hands and feet from these and set them to crawl back to the mountains as heralds of his approach.

The saint, however, wily old fighter that he was, had rallied the rest of his men, had swung round in cover, and charged in most dashing style through the sultan's rear-guard just as the army had unsaddled for the midday halt. It is estimated that he hustled forty-seven true believers into Paradise, left wounds on another score that would annoy the houris

hereafter, and spread an unclean odor of pig among the faithful that it would take at least a pilgrimage to the prophet's tomb at Mecca to cleanse away. Also from an officer (deceased) he took a gun, and, as an afterthought, charged back again through the scattered soldiers, and obtained the ammunition that served it.

This gun, which happened to be an early pattern of the Winchester repeater, pleased his holiness much. Within five minutes he had grasped its mechanism, and proved its value on the target so satisfactorily, that three more mothers in Islam were left to mourn sons who had served among the sultan's infantry: And these hits were made at under two hundred yards' rise; it never occurred to the pious man that a gun could carry farther.

But in the pursuit, which was hot, he tested the weapon at longer and longer ranges, till at length (having mastered the mechanism of the sighting) he sent his man to Paradise accurately enough at eight hundred and fifty yards, and felt that a new element had entered into the science of warfare. The trifling detail that the long stock to which he was unaccustomed kicked violently on his cheek and cut it to the bone did not concern him in the least.

Of the sultan of Morocco, as it happened, no more was seen that year. It may be that business called him elsewhere; it may be that the long-range fire of that desperate rear-guard action put the fear of Allah into him; but the saint retired to his castle in peace, and, what is far more to the point, his fertile valley

lands remained unraided, and the decennial blackmail was not asked for.

For many weeks thereafter Sidi Ibrahim drank his green tea and smoked his pipe of keef with a mind that wrestled with big things. A new factor had arisen in honest warfare. The god of battle, who was one of the old Berber mythology before the new-fangled Mohammedism had been forced on the tribe, the god of battle had grown a longer arm.

Yesterday, if you shot at a man at a hundred paces rise with all the good will in the world, the odds were that three times out in four you missed him. To-day, when the Yaiour gun with the stripes inside the barrel had been restocked and reheel-plated to suit a true believer's grip, you could kill running pig with it at six hundred yards without a miss. And then, *bism'illah,* there was its damnable faculty for firing ten shots in ten heart-beats — and being reloaded in ten heart-beats more.

The less the holy man thought over the points of the gun the less he liked them; but he recognized facts when they came against him; and when his chief adviser in the elders' council suggested that the gun was produced by witchcraft, and might well be sent to Eblis whence it came — well, his language was merely irritable, and not saintlike in the least.

Finally, after a year's thought, he came to a decision. There were things abroad that threatened the existence of the Berber nation in the Atlas, and the origin of them must be sought out. Only one way

of effecting this showed itself; he must send a son to the land of the Yaiours to learn the Yaiours' ways. With moody eyes he inspected his infant brood, and wondered which one of the six to send. But soon he decided that there could be no question about the choice. It must be the apple of his eye, his eldest, the going-to-be-saint, who would follow him in the saintship, who must depart to this accurst shore to learn how saints in these modern days kept up their state and dignity.

And then, being a thoroughly capable man in perfecting detail, he went on to insure that his venture should not miscarry. The despised Moor, who held the low country, was, he knew full well, incompetent for such a business. The Moor was good for nothing but a fight. The detestable Yahudi was the only man of affairs (shameful as it was to own such a thing) in all wide Morocco. So the saint sent kidnappers into the City of Mogador (where the London and Hamburg steamers call) and in fullness of time they returned with six men of Israel, bound and trembling.

To the ordinary eye they were unappetizing scoundrels, who were born cringing, who begged as a habit, and who did not blunder into telling the truth more than once between Ramadan and Ramadan. And the potentate, whose ancestors had as mercenaries under Titus helped to storm Jerusalem in the year 70, did not handle them with undue delicacy.

Said he: "I know you vermin stick together. So I shall retain you here as hostages while your fellow-

dogs of Yahudis elsewhere carry out that which I wish to be done. Beyond that curtain is my son, my eldest, a man of thirteen years. Him I wish taken to the country of the N'zaranees, and throughout eight years taught all the things the Yaiours know."

"But it will cost money, much money," one of the captives yammered.

His holiness nodded to a pair of experts. "Throw that dog upon his face and beat the soles of his feet till he has purged his offense in speaking unasked, to one whose forbears married the prophet's sister. My son is a prince's son, and, though in truth he must not be known as such in the Yaiour lands (lest ill befall him) all the money that shall be due for his maintenance and teaching shall be freely provided."

The five remaining Jews lifted their hands to their foreheads in acquiescence with such unanimity that they might have been one Jew.

"And for the sure performance of this task you five — and that dog, also, if he lives — will stay here as hostages, drawing what moneys please you, and seeing that your fellow-dogs in Mogador do my will. When the young man returns, if he has gained the knowledge required, you will be free to go to your homes, you and your loads of gold. But if he returns not, or if he returns without all the knowledge of the Yaiours, then I will send down to Mogador your skins stuffed with straw, as a sign of my displeasure. You have my permission to go back to your cell."

Now the Jewish organization all the world over is singularly complete, but in North Africa, under the stress of Moslem persecution, it has grown to a marvelous perfection. The cringing verminous person in the black jellab and skullcap, who is nominally a buyer of hides in a small way in Fez, really reports on the political omens and market outlook in that capital to retiring co-religionists in Casa Blanca and Mazagan.

These send on their knowledge while it is hot and fresh to fellow tribesmen in Europe and the United States, who, when such information is of value at the moment, transmit it in turn, and for the usual consideration, of course, to the big Semitic banking houses of London, Berlin, New York, and Paris. When any news of importance transpires anywhere in all the world these get it first, the Gentile financiers next, the press next, and then the British Government.

The Hebrew hostages in the saint's stronghold held anxious trembling council, and then took their measures with decision and vigor. They passed in review Spain, which always looms in Moorish eyes, with a bigness out of its true proportion; Germany already famous for push and advancement; and complacent Great Britain, which never seemed to ask but always appeared to get; and Britain won the ballot. The case was laid before a great banker in London, and he, as though such matters came within his every-day business, made the arrangements.

It is perhaps worthy to be put on record that there was no question of sending the lad to be educated by

Jews. The Hebrew of to-day always prefers Gentile methods. And besides, an Israelitish education, if such a thing had been procurable, would have cost skins. The tough old saint in the Atlas was frankly Anti-Semitic in his tastes.

The London banker sent out, first of all, a tutor to Mogador. The man was to take a house, furnish and staff it efficiently, and give the mountain boy the first course of his new education. In other words, he was to teach him a working modicum of the English language, introduce him to trousers and a hard collar, and break him in to knife and fork. The tutor was paid five hundred pounds a year over and above expenses — and earned it.

Next came a couple of years at a carefully chosen preparatory school; and then, when the boy was described by an expert as unmistakably English, he went to Charterhouse, and so on in due time to the university.

He was probably one of the most narrowly watched school-boys in Europe during this period. All the tremendous organization and skill of Israel in London, urged on by their hostage co-religionists in Sidi Ibrahim's fortress, and furnished with unlimited means, guided and guarded all his movements, and the result could not fail to be efficient.

The boy made neither boast nor concealment about his origin. He grew up among the sons of soldiers and parsons, peers and butchers, grocers and dramatists, stock-holders and princes, and got molded into

the public school caste, and was taught (viâ Greek, foot-ball, and fives) how to rule men justly and efficiently when his time came to do so.

The only mistake about the whole scheme was that they made three-quarters of him into an ordinary English gentleman, and in Great Britain, at any rate, the remaining twenty-five per cent. of Berber was so much submerged as to be unnoticeable.

CHAPTER XV

THE BEGINNING OF WAR

"THANK you, sir," said Captain Kettle, "but I'll not step down to dinner this evening. As soon as dark comes away, I'm going to up-anchor and as quietly as may be move the *Wangaroo* across to another berth. Mr. Bergash may be all right, sir, as you and Miss Chesterman appear to think, though we've only his word for it, and though you must allow me to still hold my own opinion. But there are two thousand dark Africans either on the *Norman Towers* or lying hid near her, and they aren't doing that for the good of their own health — or ours."

"Have it your own way," said Sir George rather stiffly. "But I think you're carrying prejudice too far. I've lived in Louisiana and I've lived in India, and I've as much dislike for the black man otherwise than as a black man as it's possible to have. I've got no possible use for the ignorant Exeter Hall, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* theory of a man and a brother. But I'm not wilfully blind. This fellow isn't an African nigger any more than I am. He's a blue-eyed, pure-blooded Berber!"

"Well, sir," retorted Kettle doggedly, "he may be Neapolitan, if you choose, and I'm sure his tongue's

glib enough for it; but I don't like him, and there you have a solid fact. I can't talk Cambridge College, and polo in the moonlight to him, like you and Miss Violet do, but I can listen and I can use my eyes, and if Mr. Bergash is here for philanthropy alone, and not for Mr. Bergash — well, I'm content to have my ticket indorsed for competency."

"Right," said Sir George shortly; "then if you won't dine with him, you won't. Can I send you anything up?"

"I'd like, sir, a sandwich and a bottle of beer, if the steward would bring me that when he's served dinner. But there need be no hurry; I shall be busy for the next half-hour."

Captain Kettle wished to give a message to his crew, but he did not call them on deck, as he had a shrewd idea that such items would be noted from the shore and intelligently commented on. Instead, he told his three mates and the boatswain, one by one, to go to the chart house; and, when they were all assembled, joined them there, and gave his orders in a few words.

"I may be wrong, but I expect those niggers will try and get aboard here to-night. Now, there'll be no moon, and, with this heat haze about, no light from the stars. The night'll be as black as the inside of a heathen, and I'm not going to let our amateurs play around with those rifles. They'd be just as likely to shoot some one on board here as Moors over the side; and when they'd shot their magazines empty they'd be whanging in with the butt and smashing

good rifles which will perhaps be of use later on. Bo's'n, I believe there's a keg of spare iron belaying-pins in your locker?"

"There is, sir."

"Then you will deal out one belaying-pin to every man on board, and, if the hands are wanted, you mates, and you, Mr. McTodd, will see that they are strung out at reasonable intervals round the rail. I guess an old belaying-pin, well driven, will cave in even a nigger's skull. That will do."

Night fell, as it falls in the tropics — as though the sun had been shut into a box, and by her captain's orders, all lighted port-holes and skylights on the little steamer were carefully shrouded. With the scheme of his manœuver clear in his mind, Captain Kettle, in the hour preceding dark, had already run his noisy steam winches and derricks for the handling of imaginary cargo, so that, if the sound traveled to the shore, the listeners there should get accustomed to it, and as a consequence, when the windlass, which was worked by a messenger chain from the forward winch, did start heaving up, the only impression conveyed to the beach would be that the uneasy N'zaranees were again shifting cargo. And when his anchor was once a-trip, with engines just turning at dead slow ahead, and binnacle light carefully shrouded, Kettle moved the *Wangaroo* half a mile farther north, and again dropped anchor and held there to a short cable.

From the saloon below there drifted up the chatter

of voices and whiffs of laughter. Captain Kettle bit his lips with vexation. He knew well enough how sound travels across water, and it looked as if his ruse of shifting anchorage would be wasted. But it crossed his mind that in a moment of enthusiasm Sir George Chesterman, M.P., had offered to serve under him — and obey orders — in any capacity he cared to name. What if he were to go below and ask for silence?

With ordinary passengers he would have done it in a moment, yes, have ordered it, and one can imagine that under the circumstances his manner would have been, to say the least of it, brusk. But, as things were, the whole theory of his sea upbringing rose in arms at the idea. An owner was an owner all the seas over. Captains existed merely for owners' profit and pleasure. And so he stayed on deck and did his best.

A voice and a whiff of whisky came to him out of the dark.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Mr. McTodd."

"Aboot yon black fellow the stewardess kenned. For why did he ask if I could do him a bit job ashore, and offer me a fi'pound note on account?"

"I don't know. But naturally you told him you were engaged here, and he could put his money where the monkey put the nuts."

"Man," said McTodd solemnly, "you'd never guess it of me, but I'll tell ye in confidence that I come from the Norrth, and up there it's said to be

unlucky if you refuse siller if it's as good as offered ye. So I — I angled him, and I landed the note. I changed it with the steward to make sure it was a good one."

"And bought a bottle of ship's whisky with part of the change."

"Well, I couldn't ask the steward to do a delicate bit of financial business like yon without giving him a profit on the turnover. At least, that's no' the custom where I come from. Mon, meanness such as that's a thing you'd never find in a Scot."

"Get on. You drank half the whisky, and what then?"

"Now, Captain, see here. I will no' be spied on. Tell me in a worrd, who's your informant aboot the whisky?"

Kettle turned on him savagely. "If you've come here on business, let me hear what it is without further maundering. If you've nothing useful to say, get down off my bridge. If you waste any more of my time, I'll kick you to the deck, and then send you to your room, you — you dissolute mechanic."

"And if I think myself too useful on deck to be incar — I should say in-car-cerated, what then?"

"Then, by James, if you can't remember you're an officer now, and you won't go peacefully when you're ordered, I'll have you frog's-marched there by the watch and put in irons. I'm captain aboard here, and you've got to know it."

"The vara worrds Miss Dubbs said to me when I

telled her she could twiddle ye round her little finger if she felt that way inclined. And, pagh! she seemed to think that because ye held a master's certificate ye'd be unapproachable. I telled her that men with master's tickets could be bought at threepence a dozen near the docks in any seaport town, but she preferred her own way of it. It's curious, come to think of it, why she should care for you."

"I'll trouble you not to couple Miss Dubbs' name with mine."

"But, man, you're engaged to her."

"I was. But she found reason to dislike me, and very wisely broke it off."

"Weel, I'm no' questioning her wisdom. She's a capable buddy. She sewed a button on ma uniform coat as neat as I could have done it myself. And you say she's no' engaged at the moment? Gosh! I'll spark the lassie masel'."

Captain Kettle's fingers twitched.

"If you'll no' be wanting that brilliantine you used for your hair, I'd be glad of the loan of it."

"Get down off this bridge."

"I'm going to bask in the arrums of beauty —"

Captain Kettle's hand shot out and caught the engineer's collar before he had descended three steps of the steep bridge ladder, and jerked him suddenly backward, and deposited him sitting on the deck of the upper bridge.

"Stop it," he said in a sharp whisper, "and sober up, and look there."

He stretched out an arm into the night, and pointed to the south and east. The black velvet darkness was flawed by a flicker of infinitesimal flames.

"Phosphorescence," said McTodd. "The outer splashes of light'll be oars. Gosh, but she's a big craft, yon. She'll have a dozen oars a-side. She'll be one of those big *kherbs*."

"A lighter."

"The Moorish word's *kherb*, as ye'd know if ye'd my education. I don't see for why ye're surprised. It's the natural sequence of events that the other blackguards should come off to join their chief who's tucked his way in among us so cannily. I should say that the throat-cutting will begin within five seconds of their coming over the side."

"That's my idea of it, and I've made my preparations accordingly. The mates know, and the deck-hands are standing by. But I've another surprise packet for them first. What steam have you?"

"Enough, maybe, to just turn her over with."

"I told that old fool of a chief to keep steam for full speed all night. By James, I'll log that man for incompetence!"

"You should have given your order through me, and I would have seen it carried out. The chief's vera canny on coal, and in private I may tell ye I suspect him of being an Aberdonian. But I'll away below and get a boost on those gages."

The oasis of phosphorescence crawled slowly across the black desert of the night, and presently a second

flickering oasis disclosed itself, and then a third, and a fourth.

"Four big lighters crammed with men, and all of them of the true fighting trade," mused Captain Kettle. "If they're the ordinary cargo *kherb* of the Northwest coast they'll carry a hundred and twenty hands apiece in smooth water like this lagoon. That means four to five hundred enthusiasts coming to call, and all carrying cutlery. Well, if they go direct to my old anchorage I'm free to own they'll get a surprise."

Silence and secrecy was the order of the night. Mr. Trethewy, the mate, received orders and departed swiftly to the forecastle head. The carpenter was dropped into the cable-locker, and battened down there so that the noise of his knocking out a shackle should not make itself heard. Then the heavy cable was muffled in every way possible, and dropped through the hawse-hole, link by link, and finally let go with a rope and buoy to mark it. Phosphorescence, now that they were looking for it, showed them the line of the cable right down to the lagoon's floor, and to the men on board seemed an open advertisement of their position; but no trace of this reached the *kherbs,* and they plodded steadily along their course to the *Wangaroo's* old anchorage. Steam meanwhile was beginning to pour quietly through the escape pipe, and Captain Kettle nodded appreciatively to himself as he took the temperature from time to time from the outside of the funnel casing.

The leading *kherb* reached the spot where the

steamer should have been, eased her phosphorescence-stirring oars, and disappeared into the blackness of the night, and as the others came up and lost their way they also vanished into nothingness.

Captain Kettle put a cigar between his teeth, but he did not venture to light it, nor did he risk the clanging bell of the engine-room telegraph. Instead he applied his lips to the voice tube, and got into communication with a very sober and alert McTodd, who said he had found it necessary to put his chief to bed. . . .

The *Wangaroo* gathered way slowly and without noise, and Captain Kettle, to avoid the clamor of giving orders, took the steam steering-wheel in his own hands. The night ahead was without beacon, and full of a dense amorphous darkness, but with a sailor's knack of memory the little sailor had the bearings of his old anchorage, and of every salient point of the lagoon firmly charted in his head, and worked out a dead reckoning of his steamboat's course as he went along.

He kept one eye on the carefully hooded binnacle and the other roving through the blackness ahead, and without mental inconvenience, did sums each minute as to direction and distance run as is the habit of sailormen, and incidentally kept an attentive ear for the talk and laughter in the saloon below to make sure that his owner, Miss Chesterman, and the saint were still merrily engaged in their occupation of kill-

ing time. And when he reckoned he was within a hundred yards of the *kherbs,* and had called to Mr. McTodd to "whack her up all he knew," he was conscious of an elaborate head and a pair of comely shoulders protruding above the head of the upper bridge ladder behind him.

"Captain," came a voice, "it's dark, and no one will see. May I come up on top here? I know what's going on, and I don't feel as if I could stay below, anyhow."

"For the lord's sake, miss, go back there! 'Tisn't safe for you up here."

"It would be no worse for me than it will be for you. And it's miserable down there in the dark, and alone. Miserable."

"But they may begin shooting and all sorts of things presently."

"It would be no worse for me than it will be for you." Miss Dubbs had come up on the bridge by this, and he heard her voice behind and slightly above him. The position was desperate, and one can hardly blame him for what he did.

"Go aft a bit, and to starboard.— No, the other — the starboard side; yes, there. Now, see that boat on the chocks? Yes, that's it. Now, if you want to stay on this deck you're to get inside that, and keep your head under the gunwale, and the Lord grant the boat's skin keeps out their gas-pipe bullets, though I don't think it will."

The *kherbs* had heard the steamer's coming by this

time, as the renewed phosphorescence from their oars showed very plainly. But they strung out into a line and gave themselves over as her prey. She had worked up by this time to the full eight knots of her speed, and Kettle steered her into the rearmost *kherb,* and drove over it, and then held on for the next ahead. Those of the lighter's crew who were wise struck out straightway for the shore. Those who had more talent for fighting leaped for the *Wangaroo's* low rail as they stamped the wreck of their own craft under water, and hauled themselves up, and were met by frenzied white men flailing at them with iron clubs. Whack, crash, crunch went the belaying-pins, and true believers fell back into Paradise or the lagoon.

The *Wangaroo* scraped over the ruins of the first *kherb,* crunched through the second, and of her own accord put in her celebrated sheer to starboard and bagged the third. But she was a slow little tub when all was said and done, and, anyway, she was not built for a ram, and the impacts had shaken her a good deal, and knocked off her pace and upset her steering, and *kherb* number four, furiously rowed, managed to beach itself and emit its crew intact.

"But still I don't call that bad," said a quiet voice from behind, and Captain Kettle rang off his engines and turned round to gaze on a lighted cigar and the face of Sidi Mohammed Bergash.

"Get down off my bridge!"

The little sailor yapped out the words with ven-

omous precision, and then turned to the two other figures behind. "As to you, sir, you may be my owner, but of your own free will I heard you offer to serve under my command, and I'm ashamed of your lack of discipline. As to your place, miss, I make no suggestion, but if you've heard all the language that's been flying about on this bridge during this last ten minutes, and liked it, I'm sorry for your taste, that's all."

"I apologize, Skipper," said Sir George.

"Very good, sir. Make it so. Take that native gentleman with the English accent down below, and keep him there till I come. And if he doesn't want to go, tell the bo's'n to put him in irons. By James, I'm going to have discipline on this ship, or I'll know the reason why!"

When these had left the upper deck, out of sheer delight in his own skill in seamanship (and I'm afraid also through knowledge that Miss Dubbs was a spectator in the life-boat behind him) Kettle swung the steamer round and, plotting a course through the unrelieved dark, made back for the spot whence he had started.

He returned as he had come, full steam ahead, and only slowed up to bring the steamer's forefoot to a standstill on the anchor buoy.

"Well, of all the beastly gallery tricks I ever saw!" sneered Mr. Trethewy, the mate, on the forecastle head as he oversaw the picking up of the buoy.

"But don't you wish you could do it yourself, my

son?" hiccoughed Mr. McTodd from under the break of the forecastle. "Painting deck-houses is about all you're good at. I don't trust you to make fast a mooring rope unless I oversee it myself afterward to make sure you haven't a slippery hitch. My young friend, I tell ye that the officers and crew of this packet are a great source of anxiety to the Old Man and myself, and if anybody dislikes that statement I'm free to fight him this minute. And now, the night being hot and manœuvers being over, I'm going to drop into the lagoon for a bit of a swim. Leave me this rope's end over the side to climb back by."

In the meanwhile argument held sway in the saloon.

"I'm afraid," said the saint, "from your point of view it must look uncommonly fishy."

"I'm sure my skipper thinks so," Sir George agreed.

"Well, I'll ask you not to let him hang me out of hand, which I gather would be his agreeable method of making all things entirely safe; and, of course, if you insist on keeping me on board as a hostage, I shall have to stay. But, really, I think I should be of more use to you ashore. These aren't my people, as I've told you, but as kaid of the big Berber tribe hereabouts I have a good deal of local influence."

Sir George Chesterman rubbed his chin. "This attack will take a bit of explaining, you know."

"If you mean your captain's unprovoked attack on some boats that hadn't harmed him, I should say it will."

The big untidy Englishman laughed. "Of course, those four or five hundred armed ruffians had come out merely for a quiet evening's row! However, my dear man, we won't worry about past history. The question is: What's going to be done next? We, I should again like to remind you, have come here to salvage that steamer, and the sooner we get it the better it will be for the neighborhood."

The Berber chief threw back his head; there was a hard glint in his blue eyes. "Well, you will not get the steamer. By the customs of this coast she belongs to the people of the coast, and I am going to see that they get her."

"I thought you said an hour ago that you were a rich man. What good's this wretched old wreck to you, even if you can realize on her, which is doubtful?"

"In money, no good whatever. But, my dear Chesterman, you make the usual superficial Englishman's mistake. If any one asks you suddenly what is your aim in life, you always reply, without thinking, that money's the one thing you want. You don't really mean it, but you've got into the habit of saying it. Now, money doesn't amuse me a bit. With the curse of my English education behind me, I tell you frankly this country bores me stiff, and if you were to forget I came on board here under a flag of truce — which, of course, you can't — and hang me out of hand, 'pon my word I should be a good deal obliged

to you. And I'm sure it would save you a lot of trouble."

"Of course, you can be put ashore when you wish. And you may either tell us now your future policy, or you can do the other thing."

"Now you're angry. Don't you call that a bit unreasonable of your brother, Miss Chesterman? I've been quite frank with you about the shore situation and our resources, instead of leaving you to find out all that for yourself. I've pulled the handicap distinctly in your favor, and yet I know you'll be angrier with me still when I tell you that presently I'm going to fight for the possession of that useless and rusty old steamer for all that I'm worth. I wish you could understand what a boon fighting is to a man who comes of a fighting stock when he's bored to death with existing things, and finds, moreover, that his amiable subjects are beginning to talk about constitutions and other absurd modern fads, and need some smart blood-letting to bring them back to their senses again."

Violet Chesterman shut her fan with a click. "Now, look here, you two, this has gone far enough, and, to my mind, it's getting ridiculous. You talk about fighting as if you were challenging one another to a game of polo. George, go up and fetch Captain Kettle down to have a whisky-and-soda, and by the time you are back I think you will find that Mr. Bergash and I have arrived at a friendly treaty."

CHAPTER XVI

THE CALL OF THE QUEEN

CAMELS on sunlit sand — and at a respectable distance — are, I think, always decorative. From an artistic point of view it is always advisable to keep them there — namely, on sand, and at a distance, because nearness to the workaday camel quite takes the enchantment from the view of him.

To begin with, he is mangy from his hurricane deck to his big splay feet, and out of every ten square inches that ought to be covered with hair, he wears nine square inches bald. He emits evil noises and an evil smell. He wears camel ticks about his person which he shares with any one who comes near him, and they subsequently have to be removed from one's body by a minor surgical operation. When he bites — which he does with his lips, not teeth — the effect is very much the same as having one's fingers slammed into the hinge-side of a railway-carriage door.

He is as ungrateful as a Greek, and as treacherous as an Armenian. A horse will not drink after him; sheep avoid the pasture he has soiled; and even a jackal will not eat him when he is dead if there is any other carrion within reach. Also he is the only

possible beast of burden for many thousand square miles of this imperfect earth's surface.

The camels tipped out from behind a dune, with nodding heads and ridiculous necks, and swung down to the beach opposite the rusted *Norman Towers,* and then held along the hard sand northward. Some had riders, some carried bales, and two wore hood-shaped tilts, bright with blue and red draperies.

"The ladies will be inside those covered contraptions," Sir George explained.

"How ghastly hot they must be, poor dears," said his sister. "Those coverings look like carpet."

"They are carpet," said the saint, "and of our own weaving. We're rather proud of them. I'd got some on the floor of my rooms at Cambridge, and the art people and the furniture cranks who came to see me went into ecstacies over the coloring. Also there's camel's-hair cloth underneath. But a woman's *douar* is by no means as hot as you'd think. Indeed, in war times we put our wounded into them to keep the poor fellows away from the heat."

"There seems to be a very large escort," said Sir George rather thoughtfully, "considering that you said the country was perfectly quiet."

Sidi Bergash laughed. "I suppose you on your part would describe London as perfectly quiet, yet when your king and queen go about they not infrequently have quite a small army clattering along at the heels of their chariot. I'm sorry I don't impress you as anybody out of the ordinary, Chesterman, but really,

when I am at home, I am a genuine potentate, and my mother's a real queen. To be quite frank with you, ceremonial bores me, but my mother likes it. She was brought up to it, you see. My poor old dad was a great stickler for that sort of pageant and etiquette. I believe, to be historical, we got it from the Vandals in the early middle ages, when our people hired themselves out as mercenaries to help in the mid-European war; and, if you come to think of it, the modern Germans who, I suppose, are the Vandals' lineal descendants, are just as keen on pomp and circumstance today."

"I was only wondering how we are going to find room for them all. We're a bit cramped here, you know, on this little tub."

"Oh, you needn't worry about putting up all the entourage. They'll form camp, as you'll presently see, on the shore, and I should think, when it comes to the point, my mother will prefer to sleep there, too. She talked very big, poor dear, about her keen desire to accept your invitation to come and live N'zaranee fashion on a N'zaranee ship, but I expect when she really tries it she'll detect a wobble even on this smooth lagoon. I believe some of our people did once hire out as rowers to a Phoenician galley and pick up a certain amount of seamanship there; but that's quite a long time ago now, and since then we seem to have stuck pretty well to terra firma, and have worse nautical insides than a Frenchman. There's just one more thing —"

"Well, go ahead, man."

"You see the state religion is Mohammedism, and it's part of the game that our women go veiled. I think it rot myself, but you can't get over the prejudice of centuries, with the prophet at the back of it as a closing retort to all possible arguments, especially as the old gentleman is counted as a direct ancestor. Besides, as I've told you, my mother is rather old-fashioned in her ideas, and I'm afraid she looks upon my more modern European views as merely scandalous."

"Oh, we quite expected your mother would come veiled," said Violet, "and I got the captain to give me a big state-room that opens off the engine-room alleyway, and which up to now they've used for stores. He's had what cases were left sent down to the hold, and the stewardess and I have dodged it up into a really pretty little sitting-room. At night we can rig the berths if your mother comes to stay on board, but in the meanwhile it's quite the *zenana,* if that's the word. The only thing I'm troubled about is the cooking. Will she like our food?"

"Not in the least. But that need not disturb you. She brings her own food. I say, Chesterman, you might tell your skipper to hold on with that boat he's trying to send away. They'll be awfully mad if you go among them before everything is ready, and I can tell you these elaborate ceremonial camps take quite a bit of time to pitch."

Ashore on the dazzling beach the leading camel had

halted, shut himself up in sections like a four-joint two-foot rule, and discharged his white-draped rider. The other camels as they strolled up swung out of line ahead into line abeam, and also came to moorings, and the escort, pulling farther round to the north, dismounted, drove in their picket pins, and soon had their horses straddled out to impossible spans by well-stretched heel ropes. The diamond hitch, which the western packer fondly imagines to be his own invention, was patented probably by the camel driver of Mecca, and anyway is in current use in the Sahara to-day for making fast a load on that most uneasy of all baggage animals.

Drivers and escort jumped to the loads, threw off the lashings, and opened bales. Tent poles were laid out on level stretches of the sand at unexpected angles, camel's-hair cloth was laid over these, and then the men lifted, and thrust, and pulled, and there was the black tent, shaped like a dozen big beehives running into one another, of the sealed pattern that the Berber, and the Bedouin, and the Twareg have used since the beginning of time.

Carpets were spread, and a gaudy red flag, lettered in Arabic, run up on a pole. Other carpets were strung up to divide the tent off into chambers, and to hide the crudities of the walls; and a divan was set in place and loaded with cushions. And then the camels which carried the *douar* were brought one by one to the doorway of the tent, and made to kneel. The escort lined up on either side, lifting thick folds of their

jellabs before their eyes. And so out of sight of all men, the widow of the late Sidi Ibrahim Bergash and her women moved from their places on camel back to the shelter of the black tent, and closed the flap as became state and sex.

Thereafter more black tents went up, these being arranged in a guarding circle, and then the camels were rearranged, and parked in outer circle beyond again, and fed. Each bubbling, squealing, snarling brute had its own particular table-cloth spread on the sand, with the measure of date stones and grain heaped upon it. And then the blue smoke of cooking fires crept out from the sand, and blew across and twitched the nostrils of those who watched upon the steamer.

"Don't you think it would be polite to put in a call now?" Miss Chesterman suggested.

"Wait," said the saint. "We don't hurry matters in court circles on the Atlas. My lady mother will make a move all in her own good time. Ah, and it won't be long now. Do you see that *kherb* coming out from behind the *Norman Towers?*"

"The one I didn't run down last night," Captain Kettle suggested acidly. "I wondered where it could have got to. Well, I'm perfectly ready and competent to send that below to join the rest of the fleet, care of Davy Jones, if occasion arises. I'm responsible for this ship, Mr. Bergash, and if while that lighter's alongside another turns up from somewhere else, and tries to join company, I shall just sink the one that's handy as a reasonable precaution."

"I should be the last to blame your wisdom in doing so. However, suppose you wait and see what happens before talking big any more."

It was a curious thing how Sidi Bergash and Captain Kettle disliked one another.

The *kherb,* rowed slowly by a dozen oars, coasted slowly along the shore till it reached the camp, halted there, and backed into the beach. Three men, bearing burdens, stepped on board, and the *kherb* pushed off again, and slowly ferried these across to the *Wangaroo.*

Captain Kettle put down his glasses with an angry sigh. The *kherb* was undecked and everything within her frankly open to the eye. There was no chance of ambush or sudden attack, and reluctantly he allowed them to bring up alongside the ladder without further objection.

The three burden-bearers came up on deck, saw their kaid, did obeisance to him, and one with hung head delivered a message. He, like his fellows, was a rich plum-black color, clean-shaved, and inclined to corpulence.

"Give the presents to Miss Chesterman," said Sidi Bergash.

Number one stepped forward with a bale in his arm, unrolled it with a jerk upon the deck, and displayed a carpet.

"Oh, George, how heavenly!" said the lady. "What perfect coloring!"

Number two, who carried a cushion, whisked away

a cover, and displayed what was evidently jewelry. They were apparently beads, graduated from the size of pigeon's eggs to the size of turkey's eggs. In color, they were pale green, dull red, and silver.

"Aren't they pretty? But what exactly are they?"

"Sus enamels," said the kaid. "Practically a lost art since his wickedness, my cousin the sultan, has killed off all the people who used to make that sort of thing. You're really supposed to wear them round your neck, but you needn't if you don't want to. Don't jump when you see the next."

Number three removed his cover cloth with difficulty, as it apparently stuck to the present below. Miss Chesterman beheld a copper bowl, about the size of a wash-hand basin, heaped up with something that looked like (as she said afterward) chicken food. It was greasy in texture and smelt powerfully.

"What is it, please?"

"That is *couscousou*. It is not the sort we eat every day. It is the variety that only appears at state banquets. We keep our butter, as you know, in pot jars, and lay it down as you people do port at home, and pride ourselves on its age. I should say by the whiff I got of it, that the butter that went to the making of that *couscousou* is twelve years old if it's a day, and it must have been a mighty wrench to the proud housekeeper to take the pot down from the very end of the last back shelf. Also I'll ask you to observe the fat. The most corpulent flat-tailed sheep in

the Western Atlas has died the death to do honor to you to-day, Miss Chesterman."

"I'm sure it's awfully kind of your mother, and the carpet really is lovely. But I don't see how — that is, should I —"

"You're not necessarily supposed to eat the *couscousou* yourself now on the spot. You may give that to some member of your staff, and I should say Captain Kettle is indicated in view of the officious care he has been taking of late of your excellency's person."

"Oh, don't chaff, please. I mean I want to know what one ought to do. I never expected getting presents, although, of course, one does in the East. I suppose I ought to send something back."

"That is the general scheme," the saint admitted with a dry smile, "and when your presents have arrived and been approved of at the other end, then the official calls are paid."

"But please help me. George, you owl; don't giggle. Mr. Bergash, what can I possibly send? I've got nothing, absolutely nothing."

"Then it's certainly not for me to advise."

"Oh, you're as bad as George. Would a little amethyst brooch do for one thing?"

"If it's the one you were wearing last night, I should say it is far too good."

"Well, that'll do for one present. And I've some lace. It's Honiton. I'm sure your mother would like that. And do you think — no, never mind, I won't tell you what else. But I'm sure that'll be all

right. And will these three men take them back? What are they, by the way?"

"You might describe them as harem attendants. No, it wouldn't be etiquette to send your presents otherwise than by your own messengers. The question is whom to pick. They are supposed to be attendants on your person. For one I should suggest Captain Kettle."

"He certainly can't leave his ship," said Miss Chesterman, hurriedly. "But I see your point, and," she added to the little sailor, "I'm sure you do, too, Captain. Would you pick me three really nice men?"

"Certainly, miss. The mate shall go himself, with a couple of the cleanest deck-hands as the other two carriers. They shall travel in style. I'll lend them my own gig and a crew of four."

And presently away went the gig, very smartly rowed, with a large new red ensign whipping about over her stern.

"In these sort of places," said Captain Kettle, "I like no one to be under any doubt as to what I am."

"I should like to see that little mate of yours moving his upper lip up and down," said Sir George, "when he hands over the presents. I hope he'll make the proper obeisances after the fashion of the — er — harem attendants who came here. However, I daresay they'll bring off the event without a hitch, as everybody seems determined to be friendly now. Much better this sort of method, Skipper, isn't it, than fighting the whole country-side?"

"I'll give you my opinion, sir, when we're away at sea again, with the *Norman Towers* steaming in company. It's useless to ask me, sir, to like Mr. Bergash. I can't do it. To my way of thinking he's a native, and he'll have all a native's faults tucked away somewhere, and the fact of his having been at Cambridge College makes him rather worse than better. You're owner, sir, and you and Miss Chesterman have a perfect right to behave to him as you please; but I can't forget that I'm master of this steamboat, and as that it's my duty to look out for dirty weather ahead. I've felt very keenly the stiffness there's been between us since Mr. Bergash came aboard, and if I've been driven to consolation, I think you'll own I've got my excuse."

Sir George stared. What on earth was this queer-headed little sailorman driving at now? "Consolation," he knew was usually translatable as "whisky". If it had been McTodd, the construe would have fitted in perfectly. But Kettle was not suspect; he was neither teetotaler nor drunkard; his was the easy sobriety that never exceeds. Finally, "I'm not good at guessing riddles," Sir George said. "In what form is it you take your consolation?"

Captain Kettle reached an arm inside the chart-house door, and produced a chubby volume. "*Unction for a Stumbling Soul,* sir, is the title. Some of the verses in that book are the most splendid things that have ever been put on paper. They make you see corn-fields, and smell violets, and hay, and hear the cows coming home to be milked. For a man that's

never been in the country, reading them's like a peep through the outer lining into heaven."

"Good lord! What a wonderful book! Poetry, is it? You must let me have a whack into it, Skipper, some day when you've a bit of time. Sorry to have ruffled you about Bergash, but if you've found such a satisfactory antidote, you're not so badly off as I thought." The big man had a keen sense of humor, and as he ran his eye through the tawdry sentiment in the verses, he wanted to shriek aloud. But he had a tenderness for Kettle's feelings, and kept his face wooden and expressionless. "A truly wonderful book! What a pity it's so little known."

"Real poetry, sir, needs a poet to appreciate it. But then you're a poet yourself."

"Oh, am I?"

"I knew it from the first moment we met and with respect, that's why I like you, sir, and why I made up my mind that you should have your salvage if I had to root up half Africa to get it. You see there are moments, and they are mostly when things are going wrong with me, or I'm in tight places, when I write poetry myself."

This truculent little martinet a poet! There was real strain behind the woodenness of Sir George Chesterman's expression now. He tried to speak and could not. Emotion in fact shook him like a palsy, though he fought against it vehemently, and if it had not been for a welcome diversion from the shore, it

is conceivable that Captain Kettle's finest feelings might have been irretrievably shocked.

As it was, Sir George was able to point to the beach, and laugh with an absolutely clear conscience. "By gad! Skipper, talk of fuss! Look there! You'd think from all the ceremony that the queen of the East was coming to inspect the navy of Tarshish. How about getting her majesty on board here though? It won't do for any ordinary sons of Adam to look at her, that's plain. And at the same time a guard of honor is what she'll obviously expect. The only way I can see out of it is to line up all your deck-hands in two rows, and make them hold their coat tails before their eyes and let her march in state between them to the head of the companionway."

The lady's start from the shore was sufficiently striking. The cavalry of her escort mounted their horses, and setting them to the gallop, wove in and out of one another, and fired their long-barreled guns high into the air as fast as they could load them. Camel drivers with jellabs spread over their faces formed a double human pallisade between the royal black tent and the beach, and then and not before did the black eunuchs unpin the tent flap.

Three women came out profusely veiled and voluminously clad, and walked down somewhat clumsily on the hot loose sand to the beach. From his gestures those on the steamer could see that Mr. Trethewy was hospitably offering to take them off. But majesty pre-

ferred her own craft, the big *kherb*, and very possibly considered that the smart gig was both cramped and dangerous. So off she was rowed in the ponderous lighter, she and her women and her black attendants, and the cavalry escort on the beach behind continued their fantasia, till the salt reek of their black powder blew across the lagoon, and drove off the hawk-tailed African gulls that hovered round the steamer.

Captain Kettle (with his soul soothed by poetry) had taken Sir George's mocking suggestion for a proper reception, to the foot of the letter, and the Berber ladies waddled across the decks between two rows of self-blinded all-nation deck-hands, who were kept stiffly in position by a promise from their savage little skipper that he personally would cave in the head of any son-of-a-dog among them who dared so much as to peep till the ladies were comfortably stowed away below.

The brown-bearded saint met them at the foot of the ladder, and escorted them up the side and across the deck, and Miss Chesterman (by instruction) received them at the head of the companionway, and Miss Dubbs closed the door on the party of them as soon as the visitors had stepped across the high threshold.

Once down below, obviously there would be the difficulty which first arose round the tower of Babel. But the saint said it would be quite in order for him to be present as interpreter. Even in the strictest Moslem circles and in Berber petty courts it is quite

within the law for a mother to unveil before her eldest son.

. . . . . .

It was Miss Dubbs who broke the confidence (if there was any) and described the ladies' appearance and doings to Captain Owen Kettle that evening in the quiet gloom of the starboard alleyway. . . .

"Not a bit black," said she in answer to a question. "In fact I should be browner myself if I'd been invited on deck occasionally and not been obliged to spend all my time at sewing below. Oh, you needn't start to apologize, Captain. I know my place, thank you. Anemic, in fact, I should call that taller one. But the astonishing thing was they were all tattooed with blue lines across the top of their noses and the middle of their foreheads. How any woman could have that done, and on her face, too, beats me. And their finger nails were all colored red. I thought at first it must have been something they'd been washing, and the dye'd come off. But it was too regular for that, and they were all alike. It must have been some stain put on on purpose. I suppose, poor things, they imagine it becomes them, just like the black stuff they'd got daubed under their eyes. You know: the same as actresses wear on the stage."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Dubbs," said her ex-admirer stiffly, "but as I believe I told you, I don't go to the theater. I do draw the line somewhere."

"It's so long since we've been on friendly terms, that I declare I've forgot your habits, Captain. How-

ever, there you are: eyes like actresses, and powdered cheeks; finger nails manicured as I've said, and lips got up till they were red as a post-office letter-box. But Africans though they were, figged up like you hear, there was nothing common about them. It was the old lady that did the talking, and she soon put your Miss Violet in her place, I can tell you. And what's more, I believe Mr. Bergash toned down what she was saying a lot before he put it into English. Oh, you can be sure that old lady thinks she's a queen, and she acts remarkably like as if she really was one."

"You seem impressed."

"I am." A little shiver went through all Miss Dubbs' generous proportions. "I'm not sure I don't wish I was home again, and out of this."

"Well, you've nothing to keep you here."

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing and no one. I've seen the bit of travel that I came out for, and now I wish I was back serving at a nice upper-class bar. That old woman made me feel as if there was a goose walking over my grave. I don't feel safe here, and that's a fact, and I've no one to look after me."

"I'd do my best, if you'd let me."

"You! How many times have I heard you say that a captain's duty is toward his owner first, last, and all the time? You've Miss Violet to look after and I've no desire to trespass, thank you. Good evening, Captain. I must get below and tidy up my ladies' rooms."

CHAPTER XVII

MISS CHESTERMAN'S WARNING

CAPTAIN KETTLE, with the professional assistance of the *Wangaroo's* cook, who was also butcher, was bargaining with some coast Moors over five sheep.

The sheep, with their legs tied, lay in a boat alongside, Kettle stood at the foot of the accommodation ladder, and the cook was in the boat that sawed up and down at the foot of it.

The cook ran an expert hand over the animals' loins. "All very thin, sir, except this old ram, and I should say he'll be too tough for the cabin to eat."

"Do for the fo'c's'le?"

"Oh, he'd come sweet enough for them forrard." The cook turned angrily to one of the Moors. "Give over pawing me, you heathen. I can see that's the after end of the beast as well as you can.— They've got flat tails, sir, like beavers, and by the feel of them the tails are just bladders of tallow."

The Moor evidently caught his meaning, and nodded vehemently both to the cook, and upward to Captain Kettle.

"That's all right, old son," said the cook. "We eat the sheep's smile, and when I'm let I can dish that

up very appetizing, having a Scotch aunt by marriage. But we've got no use for his nasty fat waggle." He made vigorous signs of cutting off the tails and throwing them into the sea.

The Moorish farmer was a picture of amazement and expostulation. He lifted wide his arms to the spruce little Captain Kettle, and poured forth a torrent of coast Arabic.

"You're wasting all those athletics," said the mariner. "Cookie's telling the truth for once — they're all liable to have these accidents. *No bono,* I tell you. *Tailo no bono. Tailo make-a conscousou, si.* Blackman chop, *couscousou.* White-man *conspuez.*"

Captain Kettle's Arabic at that period of his career was elementary, but his accompanying gestures were vivid enough to supply all needful translation.

"Now, there are five sheep, si? Good, you savvy that. Well, if I take all the flock, savvy? All the five, *si?* I'll give you, savvy, this gold coin, which is a British half-sovereign. Now, don't all you hayseeds get excited and talk at once. Let the agriculturist with the shaved top-edge of his mustache do the oratory. You. Yes, you. By James, do you heathen hear me? Let that man talk, and you others learn to keep quiet, or I'll step down into that boat and teach you how. Come, squire, ten shillings for the flock, or else row away to the next market town. I'm not going to stand here at the front door-step haggling all day long for a joint or two of fresh meat."

The man stopped, and with frantic gesture pointed

to the flat tails of the sheep, explaining how wide, how fat, and how truly succulent they were, and signified that the five were worth five gold coins at the very lowest figure.

"The tails if you choose," said Captain Kettle, contemptuously, "you may cut off and take home with you if you like. We're not pagans on this packet to have any hankering after animated tallow candles for our dinner. And take your ugly black paws off my trousers, you."

Captain Kettle's neat pipe-clayed shoe was uplifted, and caught the man who was fingering him accurately on the shoulder, and sent him rolling over into the bottom of the boat.

It is curious how some things strike the Moor. In nineteen cases out of twenty there would have been a roar of laughter from the others, who would have found the action a rough jest which exactly jumped with their own boorish taste. But here was the twentieth case.

With the quickness of light one of the man's fellows drew a curved dagger from the brass sheath that hung by its red cord from his neck, and flew like a wildcat for the little sailor's throat. And with nineteen men out of twenty the sudden blow would have got home.

Captain Kettle was the exception. His apprenticeship to the seas had been thorough, and he was always noted for his quickness. He caught the man's wrist as it descended, ducked beneath it, and hove down.

The fellow's elbow cracked noisily, the knife fell into the water, and the victim shrieked.

"You might want that knife some day," said Captain Kettle, and sent him after it, broken arm and all.

But the other six Moors in the boat, as though it was a signal, pulled weapons and rushed in for vengeance, and one of them beat down the cook with his dagger hilt in passing.

Kettle took the attack lightly enough. He ran up the ladder half a dozen steps backward, lugged a revolver from his pocket, and pointed it with steady aim at the first man's stomach. He rushed — and was dropped, shot neatly through the shoulder. Two more followed, and were shot down, and the other three retired hurriedly to their boat and picked up the oars.

"No, you don't," said Kettle, and threatened them with his weapon. "Into the water you get and swim if you can, or drown if you choose, or be eaten by sharks if they'll have you. And if you've killed my cook, who at least can make curry, I'll plug the three of you."

He forced them furiously over the gunwale of the boat at the muzzle of his smoking revolver, and then stooped and made swift examination of his man.

"Ah, luckily for you cookie's not dead, and I think he'll be round again directly. On deck there, Mr. Forster. Send down a couple of hands and get these sheep run up on deck. They are confiscated as lawful fine and costs for attempted assault and battery."

An anxious face peered over the rail above.

"My God, Skipper," said Sir George, "what's all this shooting?"

"Nothing, sir, to be worried about. I was just trying this gun of mine to see how high up it threw when it fired. I've come to the conclusion that it takes a deal more practice than I've been able to put in at present to make a really neat revolver shot. I wonder if your Mr. Bergash could tell me whether the parties I dotted, and who I see are all managing to swim ashore, are some of his fellow Berbers, or whether he'd prefer to call them Moors."

Captain Kettle ran nimbly up the ladder, and in the gangway came on his owner wiping perspiration from a high forehead with a tremulous handkerchief.

"The treacherous devils," said Sir George. "But I never saw a neater fight."

"Thank you, sir," said Captain Kettle touching his cap. "But in view of what's happened I want to press upon you my idea that it would be as well if we get across to the old *Towers,* and took possession of her without further palaver. I daresay Mr. Bergash may mean well; as you say so, I won't dispute it; but if we are in for a fight over at the other side of the lagoon there, I'd like to get it over before they have time to get ready any more surprise packets for us."

"Ye-es," Sir George agreed. "Just let's go into the chart house a minute."

When they were there out of earshot of the crew

and the door shut,—"You know," said the older man, "what we carry as cargo?"

"I suppose you mean those Winchester repeaters and cases of ammunition?"

"Yes. Well, I've sold the lot. The rifles ran me to four-pound-ten a piece, and I'm getting ten ounces of gold for every one, which is somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty-eight pounds per gun. The cartridges are to be paid for at the rate of two ounces a hundred, and they cost me fifteen shillings."

Captain Kettle took a pad and made rapid calculation. "That's a bit over fifteen thousand pounds. I give you my best congratulations, sir. That brings you out with a big profit on the venture already. And now I want, if you please, as captain, to give you a mouthful of advice. When we get that money on board, I want you to let me steam back to Grand Canary and bank it. At the same time I can leave you and the ladies ashore and come back here and finish the job."

"You still think you'd be able to get the *Norman Towers* out even if the people ashore who objected were reinforced by two hundred up-to-date Winchester rifles?"

"Oh, I don't deny that it will make things a bit tougher, sir. But I've said I can do it, and that seems to me the end of the matter. At the same time, I don't mind owning to you that with the ladies off the ship, and safe elsewhere, I shall lose my present nervousness."

Sir George chuckled. "You've only heard half the deal, and when I tell you the rest I believe that even you will be convinced that Bergash intends to play fair. It's he, of course, who is buying the cargo. He is going to pay now, as soon as he can send for the gold — which apparently he keeps in his wine-cellar, or is it butter-cooler? — and bring it on board here within a couple of days. But by his own suggestion he doesn't take delivery of the rifles and ammunition till we've got the *Norman Towers* out of the lagoon, and are ready to sail with her in consort ourselves. Now then, my good Skipper, play on that."

Captain Kettle thought a while, and then sighed. "It seems simple. But, by James, to me it looks too simple to be wholesome. There's no denying that the market price of Winchesters up-country in Morocco is a lot more than it is in London or Connecticut, but Mr. Bergash is a man with an English upbringing, and he knows how to get stuff out here if he wants it. Paying seven to eight times their value for Yankee rifles is out of all reason. Why, he could get even those shiftless Grand Canary fishing schooners to run them across here for half that."

"I didn't haggle," said Sir George rather stiffly, "nor did Mr. Bergash. He heard what we'd got, and he just made the offer in round figures as I've told you. I took it. Perhaps it may throw a little light on the matter if I point out to you that gold has relatively little value up there in the Atlas. They can't eat it, and they don't wear it, and I gather that they can get

it by washing out the sands in the local becks with comparatively little labor. As regards a guarantee of good faith, I don't see how he could offer a more conclusive one than proposing to leave the guns in our possession till all chance of using them against us would be over."

"Well, sir, you are owner, and it is for me to carry out your orders. If it doesn't interfere with arrangements, I may tell you that when the moon goes down and all is nice and quiet and dark, I mean to take my gig and slip across the lagoon to where the *Towers* is lying, and find out for myself how things exactly are at the moment. The glass shows she hasn't an anchor down, and I've had her against careful shore bearings, and she hasn't budged a foot since we came in here with the *Wangaroo*. Now she was ranging about a bit when we came to reconnoiter in that surf-boat."

"Probably she's on the ground. Floated there at high water and stays tight and quiet."

"I'd be easier if she did. I reckon the tide lifts some four feet six, or five feet inside here, and if she'd grounded on the top of high water, she'd show two to four feet more side at the bottom of the ebb, according to how soft the bottom was. She doesn't do that. I put the big telescope on her. Poor old Captain Farnish loaded her down with that copper ore to within half an inch of her mark, and she floats at that without so much as a hand's-breadth of change. No, Sir George, she's got water under her, and she's not anchored. The tides, both ebb and flood, run round

that bight where she is at a good six knots, and still she doesn't move."

"Then she must be tied up in some other way."

"I've thought of a breast-fast, sir, and I went to the foremast head, and stood on the eyes of the rigging, and steadied the glasses on the truck so that I could see right down on to her decks."

"Well?"

"Her decks were full of litter and muck, but there were no breast-fasts."

"I'm afraid," said Sir George impatiently, "that all this tedious technical detail is a bit beyond me. The *Norman Towers* is there, and you say afloat, and that's all that really interests me. We'll pull her out when we are ready. In the meanwhile I can tell you I am pretty thoroughly satisfied with my bargain about the guns, and the main thing I am concerned in now is to keep Bergash in a good humor. I'm off below for a cup of tea. Come as soon as you're ready."

Sir George got up and left the chart house. On the deck outside inquisitive eyes stared at him but he spoke to no one. He was distinctly ruffled, and hoped to find a more congenial atmosphere below. In the companionway he met his sister. She was white-faced and trembling. He took her arm in a large firm hand and looked at her curiously.

"Is he hurt?" she asked. "Oh, George, how dreadful! I've only just heard."

"Is who hurt?"

"Captain Kettle."

"He is not. I thought perhaps you were inquiring about one of your dark friends."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Well several of them are hurt, I gather, pretty badly. Your little captain must needs pick a quarrel with some local boatmen as to whether he should pay ten shillings or a pound for some sheep, and then, when they naturally objected, he proceeded to shoot down about six of them."

"Presumably he was risking his life, and I suppose that's what it amounts to, in your interests?"

"If you call cheese-paring over ten shillings at the risk of upsetting a deal for fifteen thousand pounds helping my interests, I suppose he was."

She stood staring with round eyes over his shoulder.

"You think only of your money. And you know he might have been killed — killed! Oh, if he had been!"

Sir George tightened his grip and shook his sister's arm gently.

"I say, you know, Violet, you must pull yourself together. I'm quite aware it's only to me, but you're rather giving the show away."

"And do you think I mind? He knows. There's truly no secret about my caring for him. Emily knows, for that matter."

"Emily? Oh, you mean the stewardess. I gather she was engaged to him at once."

"I believe she was. It's broken off now. I don't

know why, and didn't inquire; I was grateful enough for the bare fact. I want him myself, George, and I mean to have him."

"But I say, old lady, that'll hardly do, you know. Of course, I twigged you were putting in a pretty hard flirtation with the little man, but then, of course, that's only your way. You always did flirt with everything in trousers that came along ever since you were a six-year-old. Still there are limits to everything, and dash it all, when it comes to cutting out your own maid with her young man, well I call it bad form."

"I'll admit what you please, including the flirting. It began with that I suppose. But it's got past that now. I'm hit. I've never felt this way about any man before, and it's the real thing come at last, George."

"You mean you're really in love with the chap?"

"That's the usual phrase."

"But you can't marry him. He's an awfully decent little fellow in his way, I know, but, dash it all, Violet, do look facts in the face. He isn't our clip. If you want a husband, you absolutely must get one out of your own class. If you've really made up your mind to marry, why don't you whistle up Ingleborough again? He's a very decent sort of chap, and I know he'd have you like a bird. If you married this Kettle, you know perfectly well everybody would cut you."

She plucked away her arm, and faced him defiantly. "And do you imagine I'd care? D'you think I'm not heartily sick of the whole crew of them? Any-

way, you of all people have a precious small right to give advice on such a subject. You did yourself what you're advising me to do. You married a woman in your own class, and a bonny mess you made of it. You stuck one another just six months if I recollect my dates aright —"

"A year, your spitfire —"

"Call it that if you like, and for the last three you haven't spent ten nights under the same roof, and only those by the accident of being asked to the same house party. You married according to rule, and I, with your fine example before me, am going to marry to please myself. That is, if he'll have me."

"Oh, dash it all, there can be no question about the man snapping you up, if you're fool enough to chuck yourself away on him."

She laughed rather bitterly. "And you've been boxed up in this wretched little steamer with him all these weeks, and know him no better than that? My dear boy, I'd be the happiest woman in the northern hemisphere if I thought Owen would take me this minute, even if I had to go and ask him myself. But, as it is, I know he's got nothing but civil words for me — at present — and I believe I'm the most miserable woman now on earth in consequence. It will take something desperate to wake him up to the fact that he can really love me, and I'm getting my scheme in order."

"What mischief are you up to now?"

"You'll find out when I begin to make use of you.

Oh, you needn't scowl at me like a cheap actor. You are all the brother I've got, and you've made a mess of it yourself, and you're past help, or I would give it to you if I could. I am all the sister you have, and I've never asked you for anything big, and now that I've made up my mind what's the one thing in all my life I want and shall ever want, I'm simply going to make you help get it for me."

"My dear old girl, I'd be very glad to do anything I could for you in reason. But I tell you it's absolutely preposterous of you to think of marrying my skipper, and frankly, you must look upon me as the opposition."

"All right, George. That's a fair and sportsmanlike warning. Sorry if I rather slopped over just now. But if I want you, don't kick if you find yourself being used. And don't abuse me later on if you find I've run you in for a scheme that's a bit dangerous, when an easier one would have done if you'd offered to help in it decently. There, you may run away up on deck, and have your tea up there by yourself. Sorry I can't invite you down while I have mine with the saint and her majesty. I did suggest it, but the old lady's a great stickler for Moslem etiquette, and it wouldn't do at all for you to come inside our sacred inclosure."

CHAPTER XVIII

A MYSTERY IS SOLVED

THE night overhead and around was covered in with a black velvety darkness, unflecked by gleam of moon or glimmer of star; but the top of every wavelet of the lagoon was tipped with pale phosphorescent light, and every oar stroke stirred up a boil of pallid flame.

Mr. McTodd lighted his pipe and hospitably offered a cake of black tobacco and an open clasp knife to his superior officer. "Cut yourself a fill," he suggested. "We're illuminated like a shop window in Sauciehall Street, and tobacco glow will be lost in the general magnificence."

"I thank you," said Captain Kettle civilly; "but I've had to drop my pipe for professional reasons. But you're quite right about the light. The lagoon's flaring round us like a village fair, and if any one's awake on this side of Africa, and looking out, we're here to be seen. So I'll just follow your example, and set fire to a cigar."

"I wish I'd a boiler-plate overcoat like my ancestor, the Crusader, used to wear. The Moors'll be sniping at us presently, when we draw within range of their gas-pipes."

"Moors or Berbers. That head-man we've got on

board, who says he's been to an English college, wants me to believe that the majority of the tribes round here are Berbers, and they're as harmless as the teachers in a Quaker Sunday-school. The only bad men in this section are Moors, according to Bergash."

"Ye needna' explain further. It's always been clear since the creature first stepped up over the side that ye didna like him. Miss Dubbs and I rather fancy him oursel's."

Captain Kettle had a violent comment on the tip of his tongue, but with an effort bit it short and pulled hard at his cigar.

"Vara humorous," said McTodd with a chuckle.

"What's that?" snapped his superior.

"I was just sniggering at ma' thoughts an' the beauty of the night."

"And at what else?"

"Man, I'm no' the pairson to abuse the confidence of a leddy. As a man of the nicest vairtue yoursel', ye couldna expect it of me. Now could you?"

Captain Kettle tugged at his cigar, and stared at the lighted boat compass, and then stared out at the night.

"Weel, man, I'm fair surprised at you."

"On account of what?"

"To lairn that you've a wish — though you'll no' express in worrds — that I should repeat to you what the lassie said."

"You'll find yourself over in the ditch among the fishes if you don't change your tune."

"If I'd been a financier," chuckled the Scot, "I dare have bet saxpance ye'd have threatened violence like that, or pairpetrated it. Man, Kettle, bend your lug so the hands cannae hear. Ye may pluck up your courage. The leddy's conversation is the damnedest dull talk I ever had poured into ma' confidence. It's all about yourself, and — gosh! man — to starboard and over the quarter. What's yon?"

It was a bonfire, that suddenly lighted and spouted up into the sky, and was as suddenly eclipsed by the blackness of the night.

"A flare," said Kettle, "and as they haven't mineral oil down here that I know of, I should say it was somebody firing two handfuls of gunpowder. Well, it means that one nigger, at any rate, is awake and thinking of us, and that's better than being dead and forgotten. Eyes in the boat, men, and attend to your rowing. Mr. McTodd and I are quite capable of looking after our own personal convenience without your unskilled assistance. And, by James! there's an answering flare away up on the mountain."

"Gosh! it looks as if they're rousing the clans to do us honor. Aweel, I've no immediate use for your rifles. Hard work with those rattle-traps of engines has left my hand no' over steady. But I've brought along a three-quarter inch spanner, and if you'll bring the boat up to close quarters, I'll show you how it is used by an expert. Have ye matches? This talking's put my pipe out."

The gig crawled on steadily through the night,

stirring lambent flames; and twice more did flares of gunpowder among the foot-hills of the Atlas call notice to the fact that Africa was awake. Captain Kettle steered by compass alone, and (as the current was running strongly) had to make a cast back before he found the *Norman Towers;* and even then, so black was the night that the noise of his oars scraping along her plates was the first advertisement he had of her nearness.

"Row steady, men," he ordered, and coasted down her length, and then swung the boat under her counter, and brought up against the ladder which hung down her farther side. The heavy teak ladder had rungs broken, and the davit to which it hung was bent outboard.

"You will stay here," he ordered, "ready to push off when I come back;" and with that he stepped out on the grating and ran lightly up the steps, and disappeared into the black silence of the night.

Presently his voice called down in a ghostly whisper from the rail above: "Mr. McTodd, tell the men to pass the boat slowly round to the starboard side. Mind, they're to work her along inch by inch, so as not to stir the phosphorescence, and I will drop them a rope's end overboard to ride to, just level with the break of the bridge deck. D'ye hear me?'

"Aye, aye."

"And do you come up on top here yourself, and bring that spanner you're so proud of."

Mr. McTodd's gait was ungainly, but his oil-soaked

slippers made no sound. Also, being a shipman, he knew which way to turn and what to avoid.

"Weel," he said when he joined his commander, "it's a fine night, and I forget when I enjoyed an evening's prospects more thoroughly. But when's the entertainment to commence?"

"Hold your tongue, Mac, and listen. Listen hard."

Mr. McTodd removed his pipe, opened his mouth, and cocked an attentive ear.

"Well, what do you make out?"

"I hear a small slap-slapping of wavelets upon the old girl's skin, and a bit of a sough of the wind, and you're breathing although I reckon you're trying to keep it quiet; and I think there's a yap of a dog — though maybe it's a jackal — somewhere among those mountains in the far distance."

"But where are the Moors who should be waiting around the corner to jump out and cut our throats?"

"I can only hear what I telled ye."

"I can make out no more myself. If there were men here in quantity we ought to hear them breathing, or rustling, or coughing. Mac, I believe they've played a game on us. We came here (both of us, I suppose) ready for battle, murder, and sudden death, and it's my idea the ship's deserted."

"But we'll go-look-see before I O. K. that," said the cautious Scot.

"And we'll go together, and stand by ready for trouble. But it's my idea we shall find none."

"Aye," said McTodd, reading his thoughts, "it'll

look ugly if they've left her. Weel, we may as well begin where there'll be the worst smell, and that's forrard."

Section by section they searched the *Norman Towers*. They went through both firemen's and seamen's forecastle, and found no living soul. Hatches were off, and they peered into the gloom of holds, and into the gassy corners of bunkers. They clattered down the rusted engine-room ladder, and hunted through shaft-tunnel, pump alley, boiler room, and more bunkers.

McTodd climbed aloft and investigated dusty corners behind the donkey boiler. They went through mess room, galley, pantries, state-rooms; they hunted through more holds. They searched the chart house, and (as a last afterthought) the paint store. And nowhere did they find a single Moor or Berber alive or dead.

"This is a beggar," said Mr. McTodd.

"One can understand that they would go over every bit of her even more carefully than we have done, and loot right and left. But the astonishing thing to me is: first, the amount of dirt they have brought on board; and second, why they should have left it practically all in one track. The decks below were comparatively clean, and they don't seem to have been paddling about particularly in the cabins, for instance, or the engine-room. But from the port gangway over yonder there are two lines of mud and stone splinters going forward and aft, and then going

thwartships as soon as there's a chance, and then promenading all the length of the port side."

McTodd scraped a match, stooped down, and stirred the deposit with his finger. "There's too much here for them to have brought aboard stuck between their toes or smeared on their sandals. There's enough depth of mud on these decks, Skipper, to grow oats, and it looks good, dark, chocolate-colored, fertile soil, too, if one raked out some of the splinters of stone."

"That rock they were quarrying from, and which we can't see in this darkness, is chocolate-colored, too. Can you see the loom of the shore-line, Mac? How far do you make it away from the ship's side?"

"I should say a *kherb's* length."

"That's exactly my idea. The shore here is steep-to, and she lies in deep water close to it."

"She's as still as if she was docked."

"She is in a dock, I do believe. I've an idea they've lifted that stone, lump by lump, upon their shoulders, carried it down the beach, towed in a big *kherb* to act as floating gangway, carried it along that and up the side — and that's how that big teak ladder got broken, by a rock falling on it. Then they've shouldered it over the decks here, dropping bits by the way; and then they've pitched it over the port side into the lagoon. There were hundreds of them, and there were thousands upon thousands of tons of the stone. They were quarrying it during all the days, and under cover of the night they were tipping it over the *Towers'* port rail, and building up a dock wall of rub-

ble from the lagoon floor to pen her in. By James, Mac, I was boasting to Sir George not many hours back that I would pull the old boat out of here in spite of all the Berbers in Africa, and I've never yet broken my word. Man and boy, I've done a good many things to be ashamed of, but telling lies is not one of them, and it looks as if here I've made a commencement."

"Man, I'm vara afraid you're right. What's that you're doing?"

"Stripping, I'm going overboard to make sure."

"Hold you," said the Scot. "I'm the better diver of the two, as we've proved already, and those ducks ashore are still signaling to one another with gunpowder flares in the local Morse code. If there's trouble, the hands in the boat will take advice better from you than me."

Owen Kettle, master of the s.s. *Wangaroo,* was the last man on earth to take what practically amounted to an order from one of his own underlings, and I merely record this one instance in which he let Mr. McTodd have his own way to show how badly he was hit by the dismaying discovery he had just made.

He had boasted — yes, it amounted to that, bragged (as he told himself bitterly) that he could do a certain thing; and behold it had become impossible. He had been confident in the skill and strength of his own right arm, in the breadth of his resourcefulness, in the force of his own brazen courage, and behold a set

of cunning savages had made the feat he had promised to perform a physical impossibility.

Savages? Yes, but from the very start he had always held to a suspicion that there was a white man at the back of this active hive, directing them. White man? Why not that dog of an infidel, Sidi Mahommed Bergash?

Captain Kettle had come to believe in his own instincts, and openly and frankly he had mistrusted this Moor or Berber, or whatever he was, with the English education, ever since he had seen him for the first time ride up along the beach, and sit on a horse that straddled out its legs as though it were standing to be photographed in a show ring.

He slid down a rope into the boat and waited for Mr. McTodd. That expert reappeared on the surface from time to time, took in air supplies, kicked up his heels, and disappeared to make further explorations.

Finally he swam with a vigorous side-stroke back to the boat, jerked himself up to her stern, and stepped inboard.

"Ye may get back home, Captain," said he, reaching for his clothes, "as fast as ye like. The survey of the sea floor's clearly mapped in my head. And I may say the contours are — well, are as ye surmised — or worrse. Gosh, and they say in the school-books that I was brought up on in Ballindrochater that it's to ants we're to look up as the most industrious animals on the face of the globe. Well, after to-night's

experience, I shall just have to write a postscript. It's prodigious the work these pagans must have put in. How's the tide?"

"An hour past flood."

"Weel, there's a bank of stone rubble down there wide enough to carry a railroad. It's a matter of twelve feet down below the water surface now, and I should say is just nicely covered at the bottom of the ebb. But it runs up to the rock ahead, and to the shoal water astern, and I guess friend Bergash and his clansmen have got the *Norman Towers* fixed here as firmly as if they'd got her bolted down into the bed-plate of Africa and lock-nutted through to China below."

CHAPTER XIX

VIOLET FORCES THE PACE

NERVOUSNESS in Mr. Trethewy, the mate of the *Wangaroo,* found outward expression in his upper lip and nose. Always when spoken to he answered with a twitch of these organs, and even when stared at, his nose, which was of a fine Roman mold, would respond, in spite of all its wearer's most strenuous efforts to appear unconcerned. He was fully aware of his failing and utterly impotent to cure it; and if ever a man carried a daily cross in the sight of all men, Trethewy wore his in the middle of his face.

It was this officer, then, who met his fellow officers of the reconnoitering party at the *Wangaroo's* gangway, and for a while he was so violently contorted by his complaint that speech was altogether beyond him.

There were moments when Captain Kettle, who had small enough patience with this sort of thing, deliberately barked at the man until he straightened his lip and spoke. But on this particular occasion he saw there was news and dreaded what it might be. He let his mate down as lightly as he knew how. He took the cigar from his lips, said quietly, "Yes, Mr. Trethewy," and waited. With a supreme effort, he did not even stare at the man, but swung his eyes to

the lagoon, which was now flecked with phosphorescence where the tiny breakers were whipped up by the land breeze, and waited.

"They're gone," said the mate, when at length he had thawed out sufficiently to speak.

"Who have gone?"

The junior officer was stricken with another spasm worse than the first, and Captain Kettle noted that practically the whole of both watches were stowed away in the shadows on deck, keenly listening. "Now then, Mr. Trethewy, get on, man, get on. Who have gone?"

"The caboodle of them," the mate blurted. "O-O-Owner, sister, and decorative maid. If only you wouldn't bustle a man so, sir, I could tell you all right. That dark chap with the white-man frills has gone with them. Saint, I think you call him; but as nobody's introduced me to him, I can't ping-ping-ping-ping say. I'm not the sort of officer who sucks information about passengers' guests out of the steward. I tried to stop 'em, and couldn't; and if you think my conduct's unsatisfactory, sir, you may sign me off at the next port we touch at, and I'll not com-ping-ping-plain."

"But, Great James, man, where have they gone?"

"On a cir-circular tour round Africa, for anything I know. I did ask miss. I-I-I said I hoped it wouldn't rain, and they'd find the roads good, and where were they going? But she ping-ping wouldn't hear me. Then I asked Sir George, and he told me

straight enough to mind my own — ping — bally business. As for that stuck-up maid —"

"If you don't take care of your language," said Kettle furiously, "I'll fling you overboard, you blooming lump of incompetence! I leave you in charge of a steamboat at anchor for a matter of three hours, and as soon as my back is turned you capsize every arrangement I have made."

This was obviously unfair, and the mate, who was in reality a young man of spirit, had every intention of entering a vigorous protest; but his infirmity descended on him with renewed vigor, and left him doubly tongue-tied and defenseless under his superior officer's tornado of words.

"Go to your room, sir!" Kettle finished up furiously. "Where's Mr. Forster?"

"Second mate's turned in, sir," a voice from the darkness volunteered, and without further words Captain Kettle walked off briskly below to the officers' quarters under the break of the poop.

The fat old second mate was either fast asleep, or was shamming to be in that condition. Kettle, however, shook him without qualms. "Wake," he snapped. And when the second mate, who was a stupid man, and prided himself on his stupidity, opened one eye only, and that with extreme care, Captain Kettle took two hands to him, and shook with such fine vigor that there could be no doubt about sleep fleeing before such an onslaught.

"Now then, hear me. Were you on deck when these people went away?"

"Yes."

"And made no effort to stop them?"

"No."

"Do you know where they've gone?"

"No."

"Did you hear them say anything about their plans?"

"No."

"Did you see which direction they took when they got ashore?"

"No. If that's all the information you want, this is my watch below, and I wish to sleep."

"Oh, do you?" said Captain Kettle. "Well, if you want me to put hands on you again, you'd better try and do it. I've just sent the mate to his room. So you're mate, and you'd better go on deck and stand your watch."

"I thank you for the promotion, but do not want it. I dislike responsibility. I hold a master's ticket, as you know, and I tried using it once for six months, but never no more. It's second mate for me to the end of my days at sea, and I'm not going to be hustled into anything bigger."

"If you don't go on deck," the little sailor snarled at him, "I'll kick you there. And if you don't do duty when you are on deck, I'll disrate you, and send you below to trim coals, and promote one of the ash

cats to be mate in your place. Now, will you budge?"

"I suppose I have to, if you put it that way. But I —" mumble, mumble, mumble.

He hoisted his fat hairy legs over the edge of the bunk and dropped on deck; slowly he found slippers, an ulster and a uniform cap, and went out of his room still grumbling. Captain Kettle, with twitching fingers, followed at his heels.

"You will set an anchor watch of six hands, and have them report to you every half-bell."

"Aye."

"Let the rest of the hands turn in. I shall want them early."

"Aye, aye."

"Take accurate bearings of any lights you may see ashore. Is your log written up?"

"Not up to date. There might be —"

"Bring it to me after breakfast to-morrow, filled up to breakfast time. And Mr. Forster?"

"Aye?"

"If I hear of or see any shore flare that you don't report accurately, I'll send you to your room, and see that your ticket's indorsed for incompetency. That'll do."

"Appear to be enjoying yourself," said McTodd, when a very worried Kettle let himself into the chart house.

"You see the hopeless material I have to work on."

"It's only the fools that come to sea," said the Scot sententiously. "You and me are the exceptions. There was a letter in my room put in the tumbler rack with a whisky bottle as paper weight. I wonder why?"

"To insure its being seen. How was it addressed?"

"To you. It's there, under the parallel rulers on the chart table. And I've brought you a tot of the whisky."

Captain Kettle tore and read:

"My Dear Skipper:

There's a devil of a mess. My sister, who you'll know by this time, is quite unaccountable to anybody for her movements, took it into her head as soon as you had left the ship to go ashore with old Mrs. Bergash and her retinue. They've got the stewardess with them. I did not know what had happened till I, by accident, came on deck and saw them riding off on camels up over the sand-dunes at the back of the beach, and presumably making for the mountains. They'd got the bodyguard in attendance, and the camp followers were striking camp for all they were worth. The saint saw what had happened the same time I did, and to give him his due, seemed considerably rattled. It was, according to him, kismet, and all the rest of it; but he obviously didn't like the look of things one little bit. He said I must remember that the customs and appliances in his fortress were much the same as

they had been in the days of Ancient Rome, and my sister would find them abominably crude and savage. The one thing to do (by his way of thinking) is to head her off. So we're just starting for the shore for that purpose. There are horses still at their pickets. Rely on it we shall get back as soon as we can."

"Yes, I guarantee they will. My James, what a mess! I knew there was something hanging over us, and that's what it is."

"There's another word or two of the letter."

"Oh, yes. He says:

"I hope you found all well on the *Norman Towers*. If there's any hitch, I'm sure you will find the saint is only too anxious to assist. So please treat him with decent civility when next you meet.

"Yours,

"G. C. H. C. CHESTERMAN."

"I shall treat that wrongly-educated African exactly as he deserves when I catch him. Mac?"

"I'm listening."

"I'm going ashore — now. I shall take a rifle and a bag of biscuit, and a bottle of Horner's Perfect Cure, and follow on the trail of that caravan, and see what happens. If I am wanted, I shall be there. If the unlikely happens, and all goes well, I'll be free to let any one who feels inclined that way, kick me — if he

can. I leave you in charge here, not because you're certificated, not because you're competent, but because you're the best man out of the bad lot on board."

"Man, your compliments overwhelm me."

"As a favor I ask you to give the whisky a miss, and keep your end up."

"Drunk or sober I can do that last with the crowd on board here. But being now in a position of vast responsibility, I want all points made clear to me in case I have to make a choice. If it's a case of losing you or losing the owner, which do I take?"

"Help the owner, by James, every time, because he is the owner. And anyway, I can look after myself."

"Does that include his sister?"

"I guess they'll have to come level."

"And the other girrl? There could be no call to give special attention to a mere leddy's maid, especially when the skipper is sweet on the mistress."

"Mac," said Captain Kettle, quietly for him, "I've got about as much as I can carry. What that no-color beast of a saint may be up to I shiver to think of. But make no doubt about my own sentiments toward the two ladies. Miss Chesterman is one of the owners and has my fullest respect. Miss Dubbs, if God is very good to me, I want some day again to make my sweetheart."

"Aye, being a pairson of penetration mysel', that's been clear to me for some time. But I hae my doobts if it's been as clear to the other parties concerned in

the business as principals. As to your going alone into those mountains on their trail, it strikes me as the worst kind of foolishness, and the very thing that blackguard of a saint is probably looking out for; but I ken fine ye're too mule-heided to be turned from your plan, so I'll e'en spare ma eloquence. I'll just pack my own side-arms and come with you."

"Mr. McTodd," said Kettle stiffly, "I've admitted you to some familiarities, and now you're inclined to encroach. Kindly note, I'm master on this packet. I leave you on board here, as I say, in charge, and if you fail to keep a sharp lookout night and day, the Moors will take her from you as sure as the Lord made little apples. I shall be away for the shore myself in ten minutes."

CHAPTER XX

IN THE ATLAS FOOT-HILLS

THE shifts and strategies by which Captain Owen Kettle made his way from the shore of the lagoon to the foot of the rock on which the castle of Sidi Mahommed Bergash is perched would, if they could be got hold of, make a book of themselves.

But, unfortunately, almost the whole of that piece of history depends on the account given to me by Kettle himself, and he has always more of an eye for results than for the details by which they were built up.

In speaking of the period he could not rise much higher than, "Oh, yes, I had a pretty tough tramp of it," or "Those argan thorns play James with a uniform," or again, "Worst thing was, I had forgotten to take along a cake of soap, and couldn't wash my hands."

But, as I hinted, it has been possible to pick up bits of the thread of his adventures here and there from other sources, and with these to construct a tolerably coherent whole.

When once the boat had set him down on the beach, he worked his way resolutely along to the point where the caravan with the women had first debouched from the sand-hills, guided only by his sailor's eye for

distance and direction. The night was still black dark, but the rib-band of phosphorescence which marked the edge of the lagoon gave him a clear outline of the shore.

By the time he got down to the point opposite the rusted *Norman Towers* where the track turned inland, a scared moon appeared overhead, dodging in and out of racing clouds. Dunes lay beyond the beach, some of bald yellow sand, some bristling with a dry coarse grass. From among them somewhere a wandering jackal complained (when the moon shone out) of pains in his inside, and was answered by a tribal sympathizer away up in the mountains beyond.

At the back of the dunes came a belt of marsh, smelling evilly of sulphur and stale sea salt, and flickered over by fireflies. Captain Kettle mired himself badly in this, and being always a spruce man in his personal appearance, cursed his luck with point and fluency. Not till he was half-way through did doubts as to direction assail him. The marsh had obviously been paddled over by countless footmen. Would it carry a camel? "Not unless they took along a steam-crane with them in case of breakdowns," he told himself.

So, with still more hard language, he went backward over the trail, and on the edge of the marsh found (as he suspected) that the horsehoofs and the camel-pads had swung off at right angles to the main trail, and that the road that interested him bore away to the north and east. It was his first attempt at

tracking, and though in after life he came to be almost as good at picking up "sign" as an Australian black, it must be remembered that I am writing now of his apprentice days in the art of adventure, and can only depict him as the imperfect practitioner that he then was.

It was round at the back of this salt marsh that he came across those argan-trees, about whose sharp bayonet-shaped spikes he spoke so feelingly, and here for a while discovery of the path was fairly simple. It twisted and it wound, often curving back almost on itself. It seemed to delight in going as much uphill and downhill as the contours of the country would permit. It was narrow, and it was cluttered with boulders; and, as is the unvarying habit of the native African road, it had faults enough to make the shade of the late John Macadam writhe if it ever blew that way, and saw how the name of road could be disgraced.

Once a sudden rustle, and a rattle as of sticks clearing for action, put the little sailor on the hasty defense, and Winchester in hand, he rushed fiercely forward, on the old but erroneous principle that it is always safer to attack than to defend. A cloud sliding away from the moon, however, showed him that the path was held by nothing more formidable than a big porcupine that he had disturbed at its evening meal. The beast was a mass of angry bristling quills, and in another step Captain Kettle would have stumbled on them and been badly pricked. But as it was,

and the creature showed no sign of budging, he gave it right of way, and passed round it in a generous circuit.

Another time a sounder of wild pig crossed the path, and the boar in charge, a huge bristling tusker of the narrow variety, a good four feet high at the withers, scented man, and had three-quarters of a mind to charge and rip. The trifling detail that Kettle had him covered with a steady rifle barrel did not enter into his majesty's calculations. He had not seen a rifle before; and even if he had known it intimately, that would not have made the smallest difference to his piggish mind if he had felt in the mood for a charge. But some matter of domestic interest flitted across his slow-moving brain, and with a grunt, and a whetting of his tushes on an argan trunk as he passed, he lumbered on into the bush after his wives and their piglings.

With the coming of morn, the birds began to awake. When the sun commenced to rise from beyond Africa, there in the higher flats of the atmosphere which were first to be lighted, swam an eagle of the Atlas and a couple of carrion fowl, already on station; the partridge and quail began to scutter across the path in another hard day's search for food; and when day was fairly alight, great flocks of blue rock pigeons from the higher Atlas crags flew swooping down, one flock after another, to drink in some unseen wady. A couple of aoudad — mouflon they call them elsewhere — the primeval sheep, to be more simple — surprised

by the dawn, galloped past, making for the security of those high inaccessible crags which have kept them from man's extinguishing weapons down through so many countless centuries.

"The daily miracle of the dawn"—the line ran through Captain Kettle's head, and he struggled hard to find rhymes to match it, and other lines to carry on what he had seen. He was in as desperate a situation as a man well could be; all the country, he knew full well, was against him, and the custom was to cut a throat first, and to inquire into motives afterward; but somehow or other, a tight place like this always seemed to make him quaintly happy, and to bring up within him that appetite for the making of verse which grew so largely to be a habit with him throughout all his stormy career.

He had walked all night; he was bone-weary; the dew chilled him, and by the thorns of the argans he had been cruelly torn; but his spirit was bright within him, and although through sheer exhaustion he was at length driven to pull off the path, and rest under the shade of a magnolia, it was only his limbs that found repose. The scent of the pink waxen blossoms above him, the smell of the clean earth, the sounds, the colors, the noises of the birds filled him with an ecstacy that with him had only one mode of expression. He drew from his pocket paper, an end of pencil, and the stanzas rolled out with curious ease.

It was wonderful poetry.

* * * * * * *

The two Moors stalked him while he was engaged in this occupation, and they neared him so successfully that they did not consider him worth wasting a charge of powder and shot on. Powder is an expensive item on the southern flats of the Atlas, and a gas-pipe gun only stands a limited number of discharges before it bursts, as is evidenced by the fact that the pretty village in Norfolk, where the fragile flints are made, supplies only one per gun, as there is never a demand for a second. The hooked dagger, on the other hand, which is so effective for the upward jab, suffers no deterioration from a little honest work, and lasts the lifetime of two ordinary fighting men.

By way of doing the thing artistically, and not getting in one another's way, the pair separated a dozen yards away from their game, and worked out, one on either flank. The word for "Go!" was "Allah!" and when one shouted it and jumped, the other jumped also from the other side.

But Captain Kettle had the activity of the sleeping dog approached by the sudden cart wheel. Even while the knives stabbed through the air, he sprang out backward from where he was squatting and landed on heels and wrists. Practically the same instant he was erect on his feet, and springing forward again with all his force. His fist shot out before him, and, with every ounce of his weight driving it behind, impacted just below the corner of the right hand Moor's mouth. The man's jaw broke in two

places, and he dropped instantly as if he had been poleaxed.

Number two Moor again aimed a savage upward slash, which was near enough to slit the front of the sailor's coat; but the worst of that cut is, that though hard to parry, it leaves the performer at a disadvantage if the stroke misses. Kettle caught the brown wrist on its upward swing, and swirled it on upward and backward, and the victim screamed as the arm jerked out of its socket and tore the ligaments.

"And that's stopped your piano playing for a week or two," said Captain Kettle. "Now stand exactly still in your tracks. By James, I wish I'd been able to get at a gun quick enough and shot the pair of you. You'll be up to mischief if I leave you alone here for ten minutes. Well, you must be attended to further."

He hauled off the man's jellab, and tore from it half a dozen strips which he knotted together.

"Hold your sound arm against that branch," he commanded. "Up — up, you swine. Now keep it there."

He jumped into the magnolia tree, made fast the end of the line to the man's wrist, and drew him a fathom out from the trunk. The branch was a stout one and would not bend under two men's weight, and Kettle lashed the Moor's wrist to it with a seaman's skill, and then dropped lightly to the ground.

"As you can't lift your other arm to cast that adrift, you'll have to stay there till called for. I expect you'll stand at some considerable personal in-

convenience, but that'll give you time to ruminate over your bad taste in trying to assassinate an innocent tourist. And now, as your fellow cutthroat mayn't have been put as soundly to sleep as appearances seem to indicate, I'll attend to him also."

He dragged the other Moor to the foot of a big cottonwood, thought for a minute, and then eased him of his jellab, dagger, powder-horn, and head-gear. Then he sat him down face to the tree with his legs straddled round the roots, and making fast one end of a jellab rope to one wrist, hauled up the other to it as close as it would draw, and made fast again, so that the man sat nuzzling and cuddling the tree and perfectly impotent to release himself.

"You also," Captain Kettle announced, "have my free permission to meditate on the evilness of your deeds until I return to interrupt the chain of thought. Now I wonder how I am going to dress."

The ropes of twisted white woolen fabric which the lower class Moors (and their neighbors the Berbers) wear wound in coils round the head are insecure even on themselves, and the present writer can testify it to be the most exasperating wear for the ordinary white man. Either it is too tight, in which case the skull, baked by a vertical sun, seems visibly to swell; or it is too loose, and its snaky coils begin to slip adrift almost from the first moment of their readjustment.

Captain Kettle took off his coat and put on the jellab. The Moor does not wear trousers, or for that

matter American boots, but the jellab was long and covered these, and the little sailor decided that he would feel lonely without them. Then came the turn for the elaborate head-gear.

He examined with care that of the Moor who was triced up to the branch of the magnolia, and proceeded to imitate its adjustment. Being a sailor, and therefore an expert in the handling of ropes, he made a far better attempt at it than might have been expected, but the end slipped before he had gone a mile on his way, and between slipping and readjustment was a constant torment to him.

But it is characteristic of the man that throughout all the stormy time that followed he stuck to it patiently till he mastered the trick. He refused to admit that an inferior race had skill which he could not acquire, and he refused also to appear abroad, even in the wilds of the Atlas foot-hills, otherwise than immaculately neat.

There were pockets inside the jellab, and for a while he stored uniform jacket and cap in these. But as the desperate nature of his errand was more and more borne in on him as he climbed the steep paths and got farther and farther into the mountains, he recognized that he would need every ounce of his wiry strength if he was to win out in his enterprise.

It was not doing his duty to his owners to handicap himself even with the extra weight of a coat and cap of British cut, and so with a sigh at parting with them, he stepped aside into the bush (when he came

on marks that he could remember) and hid them under a convenient slab of limestone.

But it presently began to appear that Sidi Mahommed Bergash had not spent time on the *Wangaroo* without forming a pretty shrewd estimate of her captain's capabilities. Captain Kettle walked briskly up to the top of a rise, looked down into the valley which lay between it and the next spur of the mountains and lo, scattered as far as the eye could reach each way were men in ones, in twos, and here and there in groups of five or six, guarding the marches.

The little sailor dropped neatly into cover and pulled vexedly at his red torpedo beard. His squat shadow sat promptly and compactly beneath him. The sun was high overhead and the day was blazing hot, and on some such baking day as this fire had cleared the hillside below him. Even as he sat there and watched, a flaw of wind stirred up the charcoal dust and sent a small cloud of it whirling round his roped head.

"It would take me an hour," he calculated, "to get down to that line of men, and in the meanwhile they'd see me before I'd stepped out a dozen yards from this ridge, and would close up ready to say how-d'ye-do all together. My holy James, but that saint means business. That's a whole army he's got spread out down there. It's going to take me longer to arrive at the beggar's door than I'd reckoned on. Well, one thing's certain — I can't go full steam ahead till the sun's switched off again, and so I guess it'll be a

sound thing to take a watch below while there's a chance."

He turned at right angles under the shelter of the ridge, and presently came across an overhanging flap of limestone, with its front marked by bush, which gave both an efficient cover from the sun, and a shield against the inspection of casual wayfarers, and under this he stretched himself luxuriously, wriggling his body down into the inequalities of the warm rock.

"I once heard a fellow say," he reminded himself drowsily, "that he could sleep upon everything except a stone floor or concrete. Well, that man didn't know the luxury of being tired. And he didn't know either the wisdom of storing up a good reserve stock of sleep when you get the chance. . . . I took darn good care not to leave boot tracks on those rocks. . . . And if they don't hunt me out with smell-dogs, I'm safe. . . . Miss Dubbs, my dearest, this isn't idleness. It means that I'm at the end of my string. . . . But don't you fret. I'll get you out. . . . and of course, the owners, too . . . if I have to spoil half Africa in the process."

For the benefit of any reader of this chronicle who does not know the upper slopes of the Atlas, it may here be pointed out that the climate one finds up there is very different from the hot baking airs of the coast fringe.

In the length of the Atlas which lies between the Atlantic shore and the Algerian border it is quite pos-

sible there may be glaciers and perpetual ice-fields. No white man has explored them — or, to be more precise, no white man who has gone into that upper country has ever returned to report his observations, and the Berber who lives in the neighborhood, and presumably knows, is a reticent creature and will not tell. The present writer, who records only what he has seen, has felt the sun up there drilling through his head-gear at midday, and has at that time stood in the middle of his own small circular shadow. And yet on the same spot, and only twelve hours later, the whole camp has been whitened by steadily falling snow, and the chill of it was paralyzing. As all the world knows, there is nothing so bitter as snow in the tropics. The temperature, as temperatures go, may not be anything remarkable, but in these things it is contrast that nips.

Captain Kettle slept throughout the baking day the sleep of utter weariness, without dream, without stir. Insects hummed and pinged above him, and some of them browsed on him undisturbed.

An investigating jackal got wind of him about supper-time, and trotted a mile grinning at the thought of a meal. But he turned tail after a brief inspection, and left a bad smell behind him to mark his displeasure. The pioneers of an adjacent colony of ants, too, came and marched over him; but discovering that he was still alive, retired with a resolve to call later on.

It was the chill that woke him.

He was stiff from head to foot, his bones ached, and his skin prinkled, this being the ordinary way that frost affects one in the tropics. But the sea life raises one above grumbling at trifles like these. He looked at his watch, frowned at the moon, shook himself warm, and set out. He had all his plan of campaign mapped out, and after a brief reconnaissance, to make sure that the disposition of the enemy remained unchanged, he commenced the action.

He chose one of the larger pickets in the valley below, where the white-clothed men lay in starfish pattern, with their feet pointing toward a central camp fire, and shouldering the Winchester, commenced a steady bombardment at the blaze. He fired no two bullets from the same spot, but after letting off one cartridge, ran swiftly for ten yards along the ridge before discharging the next. After the first few shots he was indifferent about inaccurate aim. The Berbers had scattered from the fire when the first bullet hit a log, and sent up a rocket of sparks, and had rolled off, like the experts they were at the sniping game, into cover; and after that a bullet at random was as good, or as harmless, as a bullet aimed.

Captain Kettle's *ruse de guerre* was to make the enemy think that they were attacked by a considerable number of riflemen strung out along the ridge, who had an order for individual fire; and in this he succeeded very pleasantly. Kettle splashed in twenty shots from a front of two hundred yards, and then there was a cessation of firing as he sprinted back to

his starting-point. To the Berber this represented the interval necessary to reload and reprime a muzzle-loading, flint-locked musket. He repeated the dose over the same two hundred yards of front, and convinced them that they were attacked by twenty men. Well, they were two hundred. The strung-out sentries and supports had run in by this, and the whole crew of them were packed together in the bush. They were sons of Islam all, and a frontal attack appealed to them as one of the surest short cuts to Paradise for the lucky ones.

So word was passed with a shout of "Allah!" They broke cover, all two hundred of them, and charged up over the burnt hillside.

CHAPTER XXI

A LITTLE BERBER SPORT

"IF I go on much more with this sort of game," Captain Kettle panted to himself, "my boilers will need re-tubing. I never knew how near a man could get to being burst by running uphill in these high altitudes."

He squatted behind a boulder at the head of the valley, and peered over it down the bare burnt slopes. The Berbers had carried out their frontal attack like the valiant men they were, and had scattered at the head of the ridge, and were hunting for the men who had attacked them, and who had so mysteriously disappeared.

"If I had the handling of you swine," the watcher mused, "I could make you into good troops. You've pluck, and that's a fact, but I think your heads are stuffed with porridge instead of brains. Well, I hope you find plenty to amuse yourselves with there for the next few hours. I shouldn't wonder but what you walk into a wild bee's nest if you rootle among those rocks for sufficiently long. But as you're interested, I guess it will be best for me to be jogging."

The moon kindly slid away for the time being behind clouds, and so Captain Kettle was able to pursue

his passage across the head of the valley erect and in the open. The journey was not a comfortable one. An icy wind roared down from the snow-clad peaks of the Atlas above, and whistled shrewdly through the pores of his loosely-woven jellab, and though the gloom of the night was kind enough to conceal his whereabouts from an active enemy, it also failed to show him the fissures and boulders that lay in his path; and as a consequence he stumbled severely and often.

But the sailor took these minor troubles philosophically enough, munched a biscuit by way of belated supper, or early breakfast, washed it down with a nip of Horner, and held steadily along his way. From his last halt he had mapped the contours of the hills carefully with his eye, and he now checked his course by occasional squints at a pocket compass, the card of which had been anointed with luminous paint. Automatically, too, he counted his footsteps and estimated the distance traveled.

It was no labor to him to do this. He was one of those rare men to whom map-making comes by instinct. There are a handful of them in the navy, where they are for the most part wasted; and there are said to be three in the British army. The remaining half-dozen for the most part survey impossible places in the Himalayas where nobody wants to go, or correct portions of the bad official map of the British Isles, and send the results to publications which nobody reads.

The spurs of the Atlas, at this part — i. e., western end, southern flank — run more or less parallel to one another in a north and south direction.

In their lower portions, before they get muddled up in the foot-hills that border on the Sahara Plain, they are distinct enough, the tops of the ridges being sharp and stony, and the valleys in between broad, and flat, and fertile. At the upper end they run into the general scheme of the range, which is chaotic, and of course it must always be carried in mind that the whole thing is done on an enormous scale.

At the end of another four hours' rapid tramp, and the sailor had broken into a trot whenever the ground would permit the pace, he came to another divide, and looked over into what was obviously the valley Bergash had talked about. The moon had retired by this, but the clouds had gone, and the sky was lighted by the wonderful African stars, and earth below them stood out like a dark photograph. The valley was not lovely; agricultural land is seldom that; but it caught the eye with an irresistible fascination. Here was the only example remaining to-day of the old Roman type of cultivation in Africa.

Irrigation was the key-note of the whole. A stream, coming from the unknown heights of the Atlas above, ran down the valley's center like a backbone. It was raised by an aqueduct a hundred feet at an average above the ground level. At constant intervals were masonry dams to catch the fertilizing flood water. Ribbed across the aqueduct, each perhaps half a mile

below the one above it, were other ducts running east and west from which the water was distributed in runlets over the fields as it was required.

Infinitely simple was the scheme; intolerable must have been the amount of labor required to pile up all those enormous masses of masonry. One can imagine the rage of mischievous Moroccan sultans when they tried to destroy it and failed; but there it stood (as it stands to-day) as perfect as when it was built in those old centuries by some soldier of fortune who had learned his art in the hard school of imperial Rome.

But archæology was not a thing that troubled Captain Kettle at that (or any other) period of his career. He viewed the valley and its appurtenances with an inquiring eye, and was intent only on discovering a scheme that would profit his owners and relieve the present necessities of Miss Emily Dubbs.

The night was dark, and even the blaze of African starlight has its limit in illumination. To start with, Kettle saw no trace of the saint's fortress which he knew ought somewhere to overhang the valley. From where he stood, it lay, as a point of fact, against a black background, and was invisible even to any one who knew the country-side.

Even when he descended to the floor of the valley, and opened out the rock against the sky-line, he had walked a good two miles among the corn-fields and the irrigating channels before he discovered that it was anything more than bare rock left stranded by

nature when the great bulk of the Atlas above was upreared.

The two highest ambitions of that old Berber mercenary who had engineered it were that the place should be strong, and that it should not be conspicuous, and to this latter end he had dovetailed his buildings into the rock and built them of stones hewn from the rock itself.

Captain Kettle walked with head erect and ears cocked, and worked his way down-valley along paths that wound between the high stalks of the corn. The valley was filled for the most part with stillness, but now and again the faint sounds of moving things met his ear, and as he walked farther down these increased. There were rustlings and there were rattlings as the tall stalks of the corn knocked against one another, and presently there was an unmistakable grunt.

"Ah," said the sailor, "a wild boar having its supper," and as he spoke the night was split with the bellow of a gun, and the valley roared with its echoes.

Grunting testified a hit, but from other parts of the crops a wild stampede bore witness that the pig was there in goodly number. But, so presently, it seemed, were the Berbers. Crash, bang, crash, went the black powder in the guns, and the pebbles, the leaden slugs, and the crude iron bullets with which they were loaded whistled and sang through the corn stalks.

A Berber at the coolest of times goes on the easy

principle that no man is hit unless it is written that he should be hit, and so he is always a dangerous shooting companion. But when good lively pig are on the move in thick cover, then the Berber is a person particularly to be avoided. He shoots with enthusiasm at everything that moves or rustles, and so long as his gun does not burst, he is apt to go on shooting, once he is warmed up to it, as long as his ammunition holds out.

"By James," snapped Captain Kettle angrily, "if those careless scoundrels don't look out they'll be plastering me next. The trouble is where to move out of their way. They're shooting all round the compass."

He crossed out of the corn patch he was in toward another which seemed less disturbed. But as he stepped out into the path, a wild boar at the same instant seized the opportunity to dart across it. An unseen sportsman a little farther off was on the watch and pulled a prompt trigger. The gun blazed and roared. The assorted pellets whistled past the end of the pig's tail, and drilled holes in the skirts of Captain Kettle's jellab, and the sailor heard the plop of a cork as the sportsman opened his powder-horn to pour out a fresh charge.

The Winchester itched in Captain Kettle's hands, and that Berber missed Paradise by a narrower margin than he guessed. But in a flash came the reflection, "He doesn't know I'm me. He thought it was one of his own pals he was blazing into, and if I kick against the custom of the country and waste time

with a side scrap, I shall be neglecting the owners' work I'm paid for, and neglecting Miss Dubbs. I ought," he told himself with a sigh, "to be kicked for forgetting those things even for a moment."

Once again the stalks of the corn gave him harborage, and three times more those devil-possessed swine charged in his direction and were pursued by whistling showers of pot-leg. But the luck of the adventurous stood by him, and by no contrivance of his own, the little sailor came through the metallic showers unscathed.

At last the sportsmen either fired away all their powder, or decided that the pig had escaped, and in noisy chattering bands went away homeward down the valley. Captain Kettle followed disgustedly in their wake. "If that's sport in this country," he told himself, "I'd prefer good plain war. It's safer. Now I wonder if I can keep along at the heels of these ducks till they get close up home, and then slip in through the front door while they are swapping lies about the bag."

But as they went on down the valley, and the great black mass of the fortress rock loomed higher and bigger against the Milky Way, even Captain Kettle's brazen self-assurance began to be streaked with hesitation. This was not some cluster of tumble-down huts belonging to a handful of robbers, and perched on an easy crag that a bird's-nesting boy could scale. Dislike for Sidi Mahommed Bergash had made him believe that the man bragged when he told about his

ancestral stronghold, and here when it came to the point, the fellow had told a good deal less than the truth.

It was a fortress indeed, and measuring thoughtfully with his eye, Kettle reckoned that it might well be packed with as many as eight or ten thousand people. The sailor was a man of brazen courage, but he was no madman; he had ordinary prudence; and he saw that to march into this great hive of enemies would end his usefulness. This must be a case for strategy, and for the present he must keep clear of the fortress walls, till he knew more about the lay of the land and its possibilities.

When they came up to the rock, the Berbers bore off to the right, working up a steep rise of the ground to where the causeway came out on to the edge of the spur. Kettle left them when they turned, and went himself to the left, keeping close in to the edge of the little scree of fallen fragments that fringed the foot of the rock, and craning his neck backward so as to take in every foot of the face.

He did not in the least expect to find a row of crevices or ledges by which he could climb to the top; by this time he was very thoroughly impressed by the accuracy with which the saint and his predecessors in the saintship had kept up their defenses; but he had, as I have pointed out before, a very clever eye for the detail of a country-side, and so he examined it automatically and stored up mental notes of what he saw without effort.

In this manner, then, he made a complete circuit of the rock as far as the other side of the entrance causeway, and so far noted nothing of any interest, and having also found no hiding-place for himself, he turned back again to make a fresh examination, and this time increased his speed.

Time was getting of value; dawn impended; and if he was caught in the open when day dawned, even though hidden among the corn, he would be within easy range of any inquiring eye that looked down from the fortress above, and subsequently a simple target for the crudest marksman.

Nowhere could he have picked more unpromising ground for finding a hiding-place than the skirts of this great island of stone. The rock slabs which formed the sides either by nature or by chiseling were as smooth as the sides of a house. Nothing but a lizard could have climbed them, and they would not have offered cover for a fly. A clump of red valerian here and there, or a tuft of purple aubrieta broke the sameness of the wall at rare intervals; but these offered no foothold, and, indeed, only tended to accentuate the steepness and the height of the great rock faces.

An owl whizzed in from the valley, swung past Captain Kettle's head, and then swooped upward and disappeared.

"Got a nest there, that fowl," he thought. "Or a roosting-place. There's been a bit of a fall of rock here; the outside's shelled off. I wonder —"

He ran out briskly into the plain and stared hard at the face of the rock. The night was thinning. Already the east was gray. Day would stare at him within a matter of minutes, and if he was to find cover, it must be before day showed him to the curious. Yes, in the edge of that rockfall there was a dark patch that might well be a hollow. There was a darker stain at the foot of it that merged into green below, and meant a trickle of wet.

It would be damp and uncomfortable in the hollow even if he could get into it, but he was in no position just then to pick and choose. He must take what offered, and if it turned out that the dark patch was merely shadow and not a hole at all, well, there was no getting over the fact that his position would be desperate. So he ran in once more, clambered up over the tumbling screes, and then with fingers and toes attacked the narrow ledges of the rock itself.

He told me afterward it was the first piece of rock climbing he had done in all his life, and from the description (and he was never the man to exaggerate) it must have been no kind of work for an apprentice. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that he had learned to climb on a sailing ship, and later had been second mate on a full rigger, and from his official position had been expected to be (and was) the most reckless and skilful climber on board.

This training, one may gather, saved his life just then. He went up, he crawled sidewise, he went

down, and clambered up again with straining finger-tips; and finally got to the middle of a fractureless slab of rock, and had to give up and go down and start afresh.

He prospected more diligently this time, traced a course, plotted it in his head, and attacked it with toes and fingers. This time he had more success. Daylight was flogging at his heels, and he strove upward with every muscle and nerve in his body. But the way was almost vertical and terribly hard. The jealous inches yielded to him reluctantly. The owl, for the first time in its history, scented an intruder, and came out to the edge of its hole and hooted derisively.

Kettle halted ten seconds for breath and nodded at it pleasantly. "I'll tweak your tail feathers yet before the day comes up," he gasped —"if only you'll wait for me." And then up he dragged himself hand over hand for six feet till once more he could find lodgment for the toes of his boots. And then came triumph. He put out a hand high above his head and got it in a firm hold. A second later he was in the place where his hand had been, and the owl, complaining noisily, flew outward past his ear.

For a while Captain Kettle lay on the floor of the cleft, getting back his breath in labored sobs. The valley below him was eclipsed. His only view was of snow-capped peaks at a far distance, rosy now with an unseen sunrise, and a limitless sky spread with the palette of the dawn. He looked and lusted. "By

James!" he muttered, "if only I'd time to get you down on paper."

But he was never a man to allow himself the luxuries of poetry when business still remained to be done. The cleft ran into the mountain; a stream tinkled at its foot; and it flashed on him that here was a place to ambush the *Wangaroo's* men if so be he found it necessary to bring a squad of those all-nation ruffians up to the valley.

All evidences showed that the cleft had been but newly opened. The rock slab that sealed its mouth had shelled away and tumbled down on the screes below only a matter of weeks before, perhaps days. And the enterprising owl which had taken possession had not yet had time to build more than the rudiments of a nest, much less lay the impending egg. The main question was, would the cleft hold enough men?

The hollow in which he lay and panted would harbor half a dozen at a pinch — if they could get there. He rose to his feet and pressed on to the gloom at its farther end. The crack went on into the rock, and the stream murmured up into the black distance; but the rock walls drew together, and Kettle could not press even his slim body in between them.

A draft came out of a crack with the water and blew its grateful chill on to his perspiring face. He unwound the irritating head-rope and removed his head-cloth to get the full benefit of it and — no — yes — surely there was another draft blowing down

from above. He shut his eyes tightly, and then peered upward into the gloom. Yes, there was a hole above him.

He pressed his toes, knees, and elbows into the rock walls and heaved himself up, chimney-sweep fashion, and presently stood in a channel above which appeared to lead directly in toward the heart of the rock.

He had matches, but they were few in number, and he did not want to waste them. So he went ahead into the darkness, exploring cautiously with hands and feet, and after removing the glass from his compass with the point of his knife, took bearings of direction from time to time by delicate finger touches on the bare needle. It was a nice piece of work, carried out by a remarkably clever surveyor.

The cleft he was in was an old water channel, now dry, which had broken through in places to a newer water channel below. It was level in floor and roof, smooth in sides, and for the most part beyond his reach in width, though here and there it contracted to a waist. These narrows were never too strait for navigation. And so he came on till the cleft abruptly ended in tooled masonry, and a path (on testing) proved itself to fork off at right angles, and up a steep incline.

"I reckon," said Kettle, "that this puzzle earns a match, though I hate to waste one. So here she goes, and the Lord grant the box isn't wet."

The match gleamed out with astonishing radiance.

Kettle cupped his hand behind it as a reflector and peered ahead. The path rose sharply; it was just about as steep as one could walk on without holding to the sides. It ran (the compass told him) due northwest, and within range of the match light he saw it turn at right angles, and the commencement of another incline that ran northeast.

"My Great James!" said Captain Kettle. "Here's more of that infernal saint's fairy story coming true. This is the well his forbears dug in the middle of the castle square when they were besieged, and had a bit of spare time on their hands. A dozen feet or so every hundred years, wasn't it? Also the air was bad; well, that's a lie, anyway. The air here's as sweet as gin. Wait a bit, though. What about the hole I got in at? That's new. The outside cake of stone shelled off perhaps only a week ago — I believe that's the very ticket, and the bad air's another piece of truth to the blackguard's credit. The water's in a sump at the bottom all right, and that trickle down the creek is just the overflow.

"The only question is about that last hundred feet at the top. If that's laddered, well, here's as neat a back way in as any quiet-minded man would wish to find. But if they operated it with a rope and windlass, and the rope's pulled up, why then I guess I'm as far away as I was at the foot of the rock itself. However, I'm not likely to find printed sailing directions, and there's only one way to make sure, and that's go-look-see. So here's for the trip."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SAINT PROPOSES

"I TELL you it's no use the girl trying further," said Miss Dubbs. "I've not learned four words from her since I came here, and it's my belief I never shall. I never had any talent for languages, Mr. Bergash. I don't know whether you remember it, but I am the daughter of a minister, and no expense was spared on my education. Papa arranged that I should take French as an extra at school for two whole terms; and though I honestly did apply, if you'll believe me, I really can't *parlez-vous* a bit better now than many another lady that's not had half my advantages."

Sidi Mahommed Bergash laughed. "My dear girl, I didn't expect you to learn Arabic — or the Berber dialect that we are pleased to call Arabic here in the Atlas — in a matter of four short days. But if you stuck to it for three months you'd be able to get along passably, and at the end of a year you'd speak it as easily as you do your own mother tongue. Let me tell you, English is a far harder language to pick up, and when I first went down from here I didn't know a solitary word of it. But I believe I speak your tongue pretty fluently now."

"You speak it far better than many gentlemen I

know. Except that you've a different voice, which is perhaps due to your brown beard and mustache, you speak it as well as Sir George, and he belongs to one of our oldest families."

The saint waved away the compliment with a slim hand. "I speak my English as I was taught by those I came among. Given a decent memory, and an adequate larynx, any one can speak any language with any chosen accent. You'll find that out presently when you really begin to try. I hope they are making you pretty comfortable in other ways."

Miss Dubbs pursed her lips. "I can never get to like sleeping on the floor, for one thing."

"I'm awfully sorry! I forgot. We're rather creatures of custom here, and we've chosen to sleep on a mat on the ground for the last four thousand years. But I'll see that the carpenters build you a proper bedstead before to-night. I used to have one myself when I first came down here from Cambridge; but it created prejudice and I gave it up. One soon slips back to the old ways. But you see I stuck to my chair and table and the rest of my civilization."

"And your pictures."

"Yes, those are Cambridge groups. See the Trinity Hall shield on the top? Look rather incongruous here, don't they? I played cricket quite a bit up there, but our first eleven was pretty hot stuff, and I didn't get my colors till my third year. I was tried for the 'varsity all the same."

"Isn't that — yes it is. There's his name underneath — J. B. Hartman. Well I never!"

"Why, do you know him?"

"In a way, as you may say, I did. He used to stay in Foston just after I first left school, and went into the business."

"I never suspected Hartman of business tastes."

"Perhaps he hadn't. He was yachting when he came to us."

"Stayed with you, d'you mean?"

"At our hotel, the Mason's Arms. I was the bar lady."

Sidi Mahommed ran an appreciative blue eye over Miss Dubbs' elaborate black hair, her full color, her deep bust, her well-rounded form. He laughed shortly. "It's a wonder you've escaped marriage so long."

"Getting married is a matter of taste. But in my case, Mr. Bergash, I can assure you it has not been for want of opportunities. I've had my offers. And though, to be sure, we ladies in our profession have more admirers than most, being as you may say brought into contact with a great many gentlemen every day of our lives, I can tell you plain, I know I've only had to nod at least a dozen times, and I could have settled down, and a house, of my own, within three months. But I preferred my liberty. And do still."

"A girl with your attractions ought to make a great marriage."

"Oh, I don't undervalue myself. But I don't intend to get married. So we'll please change the subject, and as you've been inquisitive, I'll be the same. Is that basin on my toilet-table made of tin?"

"I haven't seen it, but anyway I can guarantee the thing is not tin. Tin doesn't grow here. If it's white metal —"

"It is."

"Then it's silver. Why?"

"A silver wash-basin! My! you do have some style. And the carafe and tooth mug, are they brass?"

"Well, if you corner me, I'll have to suggest they're gold. Why? Do they taste, or something? Aren't they clean?"

Miss Dubbs looked at her host with a new respect. "I thought only royalty had gold and silver toilet ware?"

"I believe it's more the rule among American millionaires. But if you insist on the point, I suppose we can qualify all right. We really are kings in our way, and if you come to think of it, our ancestors were reigning kings here in the Atlas when yours were running about Great Britain discussing the latest tint in blue paint."

"You needn't be indelicate."

"You shouldn't draw me on into bragging comparisons, then. How would you like to live here? Look through the window. You can't beat that view in all the world."

"A lady can't live on view alone," said Miss Dubbs shrewdly. "And for a gentleman who has been to college at Cambridge, your idea of comfort strikes me as incomplete. You give me a silk carpet to my room, and the floor's like a rough stone road underneath it; you put a gold-backed hand-glass on the table, but not a bit of paper on the walls; and you've got a yellow metal lamp, inlaid with what looks like real jewels hanging from the ceiling, and not so much as a single pane of glass in the window."

"That's Berber custom. If I had an English wife it could be changed."

"And while she was at it (if you'll excuse me mentioning it) she might look after the cooking. I don't mind things a bit greasy, but really that Irish stew, which is your mama's favorite dish, just swims with fat sometimes. And you ought to do something to the dairy. I don't call butter tasty when it smells like what they serve here."

The kaid beat the table with his fist. "Now you," he said, "take the practical view, and that is what I like. You don't talk a lot of tommy rot about poetry, and the pride of high place, and the responsibilities of rule, and other things that I know about just as well myself; but you've an eye for essential facts, and the wit to point out cures for what is wrong. I call pumping up poetry the worst kind of skittles."

"Well, there I disagree with you. I can't make poetry myself, but a gentleman friend of mine can make the most beautiful verses that were ever read

or written, yes, and set them to music, and play them to his own accordion accompaniment! And yet he's the most businesslike and practical gentleman I ever met. No, never mind who he is. That doesn't matter. I was only telling you about him to prove that poetry doesn't always drag a man down to long hair and a velvet coat. And that reminds me, we're here alone, and perhaps you won't mind telling. Of course I'll keep it confidential, but are you really a Sidi?"

"I'm the genuine article."

"Meaning saint?"

"That's it. Beware of imitations. I insist on having the one and only original."

"But some one told me — I mean I was told that one always addressed a Mohammedan gentleman in Algeria as 'Si' or 'Sidi', just as we say 'Mister'."

"That's perfectly correct, and I'd like to bet you a pair of gloves I could name your informant."

"Well, I won't bet. But it was Captain Kettle."

"Precisely. He's tried to throw doubt on everything about me, from A to Z. I wonder why the man detests me so heartily?"

Miss Dubbs laughed. She had as a rule a fine, rich, deep laugh, that it was really a pleasure to listen to; but just now her laughter was forced, and it grated. "I should say the reason's perfectly clear. You cut him out with his young lady."

"How do you mean?"

"After you turned up with your tale of being a

saint and all that, Miss Chesterman would barely so much as look at the captain. Why, till you came I looked upon them as good as engaged."

"Did you indeed? About that saintship; it's genuine enough. If I were to die to-night my people would put up a nice neat tomb down in the valley there, with square corners, and a round domed top, and they'd drop attending at the late saint's tomb, and come and say their prayers at mine."

"And who was the late saint?"

"My father, to be sure. I follow on, whether I like it or not, and the people are annoyed with me because I show no present signs of providing a successor to myself. They say it's time I had a queen."

Miss Dubbs looked out over the fertile valley. "A queen!" she murmured.

"That's the idea. But of course that doesn't interest you."

"And why not?"

"Because — well, because you are engaged, aren't you?"

"To whom, pray?"

"Kettle — so I gathered."

Miss Dubbs put back her shoulders, and showed the whole of her splendid height and figure.

"I'd scorn to deceive you, Mr. Bergash — or I should say, Saint. I was engaged to the captain once. But it was a mistake, both on his part and on mine, and it's over and done with. I wouldn't marry him now, no, not if he was to come down on his

bended knees to me, no, nor even if he was to ask me on paper. If any lady's seen the foolishness of marriage, without going so far as to have her finger burned with a ring, it's me. That's straight. You can look upon me as an old maid, and glad of it. No, Mr. Saint, there's no marrying for yours truly."

"I can imagine that being wife to a man who's away at sea nine-tenths of the time, and staying behind on a narrow income, would be an overrated amusement."

"It would be all right," snapped Miss Dubbs, "if the man was the right man."

"Oh, I quite agree with you — as long as the novelty of it lasted. Only, don't you think that the old saying about romance is pretty true?"

"Which old saying?"

"Why, that romance flies out of the window when there are not enough dollars on the hearth to keep it warm. Mark you, I'm only theorizing, or, to be more accurate, quoting theory. For myself, I've always been one of those very ordinary men who have never known what it is to be otherwise than well-off. I've always had more money than I knew how to spend, and more servants than I could keep amused, and more power than I really knew what to do with. Ever try power, Miss Dubbs? Ever occur to you that in my small kingdom up here I'm the most absolute monarch now reigning on earth? I've the high justice, the middle, and the low. If I took the richest of my subjects this afternoon, or the poorest, and cut off

his head, and put into my own house the uttermost part of his possessions, do you think anybody would object?

"Not a solitary man, woman, or child of them. If to-morrow morning I called out every man among my subjects between the ages of sixteen and sixty, and led them against the sultan of Morocco — or, say against the *Wangaroo* — led them, if you like, to what they knew would be certain death, do you think there would be a question asked or an objection raised? Not one. Oh, I tell you there are no modern ideas of the people's rights among the Berbers of the Atlas. They are firmly imbued with the idea that they merely remain alive for the earthly honor and the heavenly delight of serving a saint, and I haven't it in me to teach them anything different."

"You ought to be happy."

"I ought. I believe I should be if my father had not made that one fatal blunder of sending me to England for an education. It was good for the tribes: I admit that. But it has just been hell for me. After I have seen English women like yourself, who are free, practically, as men; who ride, dance, play tennis, write books, ride to hounds, how could I marry a woman of my own people, who has been brought up behind a veil, and thinks it immoral to know how to read and write, or to have any idea of her own?"

"I must say I think the way your ladies tattoo the tops of their noses disgusting."

"And if you like, there's that also. I couldn't sit

down for the rest of life opposite a Mrs. Bergash with her family coat of arms tattooed in wavy lines across her face. I thought nothing of it once, but now I simply couldn't do it. And that, I'll trouble you, is only one result of Cambridge."

"But wouldn't your people be annoyed if you went outside the district for your wife?"

"Annoyed with me? They don't know the meaning of the word. As I have tried to tell you, their creed is that they are graciously permitted to be on earth for the one and only purpose of doing their saint's will. And besides, it has almost always been a custom with us kaids to go abroad for our wives. The record's carved up on the stone of one of the rooms below, and I'll show it to you if you like.

"We can't read a lot of the earlier inscriptions. But one of the more recent queens was a Phœnician; two more were Carthaginians; one was bought from that bigamous old sweep, Solomon, as the price for a Barbary lion; several were Roman in Rome's prime; then there were Visigoths, and Huns, and Iberians, and a Norse girl, and some French. Two were English, taken from ships by some of our people who went a-raiding from Sallee. My grandmother was daughter of a Spanish consul at Mogador."

"But your mother?"

"She is a pure-blooded Berber. My father was the exception to our rule. And, moreover, he loved her. As I do also."

"I'm sure she's a very pleasant lady, though I must admit that she strikes me as foreign."

The kaid laughed. "She would. But you've seen her here; you've been about with her into other houses on the rock. Did she leave any doubt in your mind as to who was queen?"

"She did not"—Miss Dubbs shivered. "I don't speak Berber, of course, and I don't understand a lot that goes on, but I rather thought she ordered one lady we called on to be flogged."

"I'm not supposed to know what goes on behind the curtain, and I make a point of not knowing. But I'll admit, if you like, that it's quite possible. My mother prides herself on keeping up the old Berber tradition, and, anyway, she's great on discipline. She's every inch a queen."

"Well," said Miss Dubbs pointedly, "all I can say is you'd better not let your Miss Chesterman know. At the same time I'll trouble you not to scowl at me like that. You'll kindly remember that I'm a lady and intend to be treated as such."

With an effort Sidi Mahommed Bergash did not beat the table. "I should have thought it might have occurred to you by this time that I am not altogether a man to be fooled with. We will leave Miss Chesterman out of the conversation, if you please."

"Then the conversation, as far as I am concerned, will end."

"Not at all. If you wish me to explain, I will

do so. I brought Miss Chesterman and her brother here as a means to an end."

"Precisely."

"You say precisely. Then you recognize that it was to bring you here, Emily, that I used them?"

"I recognize nothing of the sort. And you will please remember that my name to you, and for that matter to everybody else, is Miss Dubbs."

"For the present, if you like, Miss Dubbs it shall be. For the future we shall see. In the meanwhile I have the honor to offer you marriage."

"What, you want to marry me?"

"As you have known perfectly well all along. Now come, my dear girl, let us look facts in the face. You are piqued for the moment and raw (if you like) from a trivial disappointment. From your own telling the *affaire* Kettle was only one of many."

"It was nothing of the kind."

"Well, have it your own way. But your engagement with him is at an end. Now look at what I can offer you — lands, houses, servants, wealth, power. Did you ever think of the sweets of absolute sway, Emily? You will be a queen, with power of life and death over all your subjects, and if I know your capacity I shall be one of those subjects also. You will want an English girl as companion. I give you Miss Chesterman. If you wish for a larger kingdom I will conquer it for you. Everything that power can get and love can think of will be yours. And please remember this: I have loved you from the first mo-

ment I put eyes on you, and determined then to make you my queen if love could do it."

Miss Dubbs stood up and looked steadily down into the man's blue eyes. "I'm sorry you've spoken," she said. "But you'll give me credit for trying to head you off from proposing."

"I know that, but I'd too much at stake to take your hint. Besides, I wanted to lay out fairly before you what I have to offer."

"I would rather you did not go on, because there can be only one answer, and that's 'no'. There could be no lady more conscious of the compliment you have paid me, Saint, and the offer to make me a queen is, of course, extremely fascinating. But marrying's a thing I'm set against, and there you have the whole tale in a nutshell. I should like, if you would let me, to regard you always as a very close friend, but it will never get beyond that. And now it would be more comfortable for both of us if you changed the subject."

"No." The Berber chief's blue eyes grew hard, and his brown beard stuck out aggressively. "I have offered you the easy path, Emily, and I have made my proposal to you on honorable English lines. But there is too much at stake to let you upset all my schemes for the sake of a paltry whim. To this valley and this rock you have come, and here you will stay for the rest of your natural life. Make no mistake about that. Again I ask: will you be queen?"

"I'd rather die first," said Miss Dubbs shortly.

"You can guess the alternative?"

"I prefer to remember that you are a gentleman with an English education, and that, therefore, you won't make threats."

"It would be better if you made no allusion to the unfortunate circumstance of my upbringing. I can tell you it has been the curse of my existence, and the detail of my gentility is beginning to wear very thin. At present, Emily, I am supreme kaid of the Western Atlas Berbers, with power of life, and death, and fortune over everything within my marches, and am in no mood to be thwarted." The blue eyes gazed hungrily on the English girl's splendid womanhood. "So you can be assured of just one broad fact. My wife you are going to be, and it would be more comfortable for both of us if you came to me willingly."

"That I never will."

"Then I shall leave you for the time being to think out for yourself the obvious alternatives. I am sure that when you have conned over the matter coolly, you will take the sensible view. You are a sensible level-headed girl, Emily, and I believe it is that which attracted me to you at the first. I will go now. And I will come back for your favorable decision at ten o'clock to-night."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CAPTAIN DISPOSES

SIDI MAHOMMED BERGASH once told Sir George Chesterman that tradition in the Atlas said the architect who built the campanile in Saint Mark's Square at Venice was a Berber, and that he got his idea for the inclined footways of that much overrated bell-tower from the mode of descent to the siege-well in his ancestral fortress. The legend may or may not be true, but, anyway, it is plausible, and except that the man at Venice turned the idea inside out, and from a well evolved a tower, and incidentally eased the angles of the inclines, the plans of the two works are identical.

Captain Kettle felt that he could not afford matches, and, after the day had passed, explored the slopes in the inky dark. So, as I have only his report to go upon, details will, for the most part, be lacking in this memoir. The cut was only a trifle over four feet wide, so he could easily keep a hand on each wall, and having all of a sailor's distrust for navigation in strange waters, he always took a careful sounding with his advance foot, and assured himself that the floor was in place, before putting weight on it. There are such things as winzes in these inclined shafts,

and Captain Kettle did not propose to walk into eternity unawares, if ordinary precaution could keep him alive and useful.

Of course, as he foresaw, the critical bit was the last hundred feet, which, as the saint had told, the old sinkers had driven vertically. It is easy to be wise after the event, but really if Captain Kettle had been the slenderest student of archæology, his qualms on this point would have been at rest. The windlass is a comparatively modern machine, and the sinking of that first hundred feet of well-shaft had antedated it by certainly ten, and very possibly twenty centuries.

The only method known to the ancients of hoisting spoil from vertical workings was in skin bags, made fast by two, three, or even five rawhide ropes, each manned by its own hauling crew. This was expensive in labor, and (owing to the chafe on the well-lip) in ropes also, and therefore it was avoided as much as possible. Only in rare instances were the workers hauled up vertical shafts. For the most part they climbed up by notched chicken ladders set diagonally, though in the very early times, when shafts measured two feet nine by four feet three as a standard all the world over, they climbed up by means of foot brackets set opposite one another on the two longer sides.

The engineer, who in the year B. C. 709 had planned the Bergash well, probably hoped to strike water within the first hundred feet. When he was disappointed in this, he did not proceed straight away to

sinking in inclines from the bottom of his hundred-foot level. That would have entailed difficulty in hoisting his spoil.

But being a thoughtful man, he put down another set of inclines from the surface to the hundred-foot level, so that all rock mined below could be carried direct by baskets and skin bags to daylight without once having to be hauled by the rope men. I have often wondered, by the way, whether they did this work by driving it overhand from below. Of course upraises . . . but that is a technical point, which has little bearing on this memoir of Captain Kettle and Miss Emily Dubbs.

If Captain Kettle had tried to climb the hundred-foot vertical finish to the well-shaft he would have been met at the upper end (although, of course, he did not know this) by a solid door of three-inch oak, held down by perhaps a foot of the gravel which floored one of the courtyards of the fortress. But at the foot of this vertical shaft he paused, fingering the footholds, and recruiting his breath; and while engaged in these easy employments, fancied he felt a draft in the neighborhood of his left ear.

His right ear was facing the incline up which he had ascended, and his left ear (so he had imagined in the dark) was close to the solid rock. In order that there should be no doubt about it, he wetted a finger and held it up. The finger chilled most distinctly on the left side. There was a draft, and therefore another passage somewhere.

He lighted one of his precious matches, and discovered the entrance to the farther set of inclines of which I have spoken, and which the saint had never mentioned, and (as it turned out) had never heard of. And it was up these, walking, and not climbing, that Kettle made his entrance into the fortress.

Sometime ago, when during some forgotten siege, work on the bottom incline had suddenly struck water, and the well was pronounced complete, the surface end had been walled up, and furnished with a door. This was somewhere about 750 or 780 A. D. The well has not been used much since, because of its propensity for harboring carbon dioxid, and as far as I can make out, the door has only been opened during five of the fortress' many sieges. They have rock-cut rain-water cisterns, which supply every-day use, and anything up to a five years' siege.

Of course the door has been renewed a good many times since then, because even white oak from the mid-Atlas ranges lasts only a bare eighty years when it is fully exposed to the weather. But the same type of ponderous, complicated, wooden, Berber key has been used during all the centuries to shoot the wooden bolt in the marvelous wooden lock, and it is officially supposed to occupy a nail in the kaid's treasure vault, and probably hangs there to this day.

The only drawback to these old locks is that they are entirely open on the inside, and even without wasting a match over the process, Kettle was able to lift the tumblers one by one with his fingers, and pull

the cobweb-clogged bolt out of its socket. The massive oak door was inclined to scream on its vertical pivots. But when it was dragged open a sixty-fourth of an inch at a pull, with a neat boot pressed against the inside to steady it, this complaining sound was reduced to the merest murmur. And when the gap was wide enough, Captain Kettle stepped out into the full smell of an active cow stable.

Two lady cows scented him simultaneously, and snuffled him with moist noses, and presently diagnosing him as a stranger, plunged backward against their head ropes.

"Coosh! coosh!" said Kettle soothingly and the cows, not knowing that British term of endearment, plunged harder to the right hand and to the left. The sailor was annoyed at his lack of agricultural charm, but took advantage of the fairway, and made swift passage to the rear. Moonlight glimmered in through an arrow-slit, and he grasped the elementary fact that the stable held another building above its sturdy arches.

His eyes, after their long training in the black darkness of the inclines, acted readily in this gentle gloom. He made quick circuit of the walls, and found a door, opened it, and saw a street; peered up and down that, discovered it to be empty, and then ran out to the opposite wall and looked upward. He saw a big house above the cow stable, built of massive stone blocks, and narrowly windowed. None of the windows was glazed, and most were in darkness.

But three were lighted, and from one of these came voices. He thrilled to his innermost nerve as one of the voices reached him — and with it a faint smell of frangipani — and was within an ace of calling out that he was near, and armed, and full of fight, and ready to upset half the available world to bring assistance. He had the words "Miss Dubbs" on the edge of his lips, when common prudence drummed into him that there were ten thousand men within call, and if he wanted to be useful he must employ wit, and not common vulgar valor. He searched the wall of the big house for its main entrance door, found it, ran across, opened and entered.

Within was a most exasperating warren of passages and stairs. There seemed to be no ordinary human plan, no method, in the architecture of that Berber interior. There were steep stairs and narrow stairs, passages on the level and passages on the incline, straight passages, and others that wound in figures of eight. Also, although the inside partition walls were eight to ten feet thick, the whole house seemed full of the murmur and whisper of voices, and warm with human occupation, and savory with the smell of cooking.

It was all unnerving enough to the amateur, but Captain Owen Kettle was a man of brazen nerve. He resolutely pushed a black rifle muzzle ahead of him, and went on with his exploration without any acceleration to his heart-beats.

He turned so many times that in spite of his sea

training for courses he was frankly lost in the maze of alleys and arches. Three times he thought he had hit on the right room, and listened at a nail-studded door, and heard only the twitter of foreign speech. But at last he came to a narrow window which looked on the street he had recently left, and from that he got his bearings.

He turned sharply to his left, burst into an anteroom — and found it empty. But he was on the right track now. Miss Dubbs' full rich contralto was giving forth strong opinions from close at hand.

Kettle turned to the door behind him and shut it, and finding a heavy bronze bolt, shot that into its stone socket. Then once more he pressed ahead.

The next room was a surprise to him. The voices had stopped for the moment, and he looked about him in wonder. On the walls were photographs of English cricket elevens in flannels, association foot-ball teams in their quaint attire, and groups of self-conscious young men in straw hats and weird ill-cut tweeds, all framed in oak, and surmounted by gaudy coats of arms in colors.

There were English tobacco-pipes and Moorish sabers, yellow-backed novels, and a yard-long British posthorn, a fox's mask, and a stale copy of the *Sporting Times* in this amazing room. On a side table among ash trays was a heavy .450 Hopkins Allen revolver. Captain Kettle picked it up, found it to be loaded, and put it in one of the pockets of his jellab for future reference. And at that moment the voice

of Miss Dubbs, crying out in terror, thrilled him in a way he had never been thrilled before.

There was another doorway to the room, hidden by a drapery. He dashed through this and saw the girl struggling in Sidi Mahommed Bergash's arms.

The way that Berber kaid was thrown to the ground surprised him. He was clutched by iron hands, shaken with a tigerish ferocity and strength, plucked from his feet and thrown sprawling as though he had been as inanimate as a pillow.

The sailor stood over him with uplifted gun butt.

"I'll teach you to lay your sacrilegious hands on Miss Dubbs, you brown-bearded son of an unqualified pastry-cook. You'll apologize to her here and now for what you've said and done, or I'll smash your worthless head like a rotten egg-shell, and glad of the chance."

"I offered to make her my queen, and that I take it is no insult. But if my wooing was too rough for the lady's taste, then for this I do apologize."

"I call that half-hearted. Miss Dubbs, you needn't accept it unless you choose. Besides I don't know how deep his insults have gone. Say the word, and I'll kill him."

"Thank you, Captain, he did propose, and I refused; and well, that's over, and we'll say no more about it. But I'm glad you came. I don't know what I should have done without you. Oh, Captain, take me away from this. Take me back to your ship."

"Certainly, Miss Dubbs, certainly I will. There,

don't you fret any further, and if you feel a little trembly, please sit down on this sofa, and presently it will pass away. Try a drop out of this bottle. It's Horner's Perfect Cure, and you will find that it meets your case. And as for you, Mr. Bergash, if you attempt to stir from that floor till I am ready for you, I'll put you to sleep permanently. So chew on that, you dog. Now tell me where are my owner and his sister."

"In their rooms."

"Free and at liberty?"

"Yes," said the kaid.

"No," said Miss Dubbs.

Captain Kettle's boot shot out and crashed into the kaid's ribs with a regular Cape Horn mate's kick. "Lie to me, you swine, and I'll stove in every slat in your body. Where are their rooms?"

"Below. I suppose they would call it in the basement. They got troublesome, and I had to put them somewhere where they couldn't create a disturbance. It was for their own good. If my people here had gathered that Chesterman was shouting threats and insults at me, they'd have killed him and his sister out of hand. I can't get them to understand that I'm looked upon as a holy man, and the people here would consider it a mere act of piety to knock on the head anybody that annoyed me."

"Holy man! You! I'll handle you before your people in a way I wouldn't handle a yellow dog, if you give me trouble. Let me see if you are armed."

The little sailor ran a skilled hand over the kaid's clothing. "Apparently not. Left your Hopkins Allen in the next room before you came along here to insult a defenseless lady, through fear, I suppose, that she'd pull it and use it on you? Well, I've that gun in my pocket, and another to match it. Miss Dubbs, my dear, might I trouble you to carry this Winchester rifle? If anybody annoys you, if you'll kindly place this small end up against their clothes, and pull this trigger here, I'll be obliged to you. And now, Mr. Bergash, on to your feet. Smartly there! Attention! You are to stand exactly still till you are given my permission to move."

"If you want the girl," said the kaid, "and she wants you, take her and go."

"Say 'sir' when you address me, and don't speak until you're spoken to. By James, you've got to learn respect, and you'll find the lessons rough if I have to give them to you. Don't slouch like that! Stand erect, you swine. Heels together, and clasp your hands behind the back of your neck. Now, then, you're to lead, when I give the word, to the place where Sir George and Miss Violet are jailed. If there are any unpleasant incidents by the way, you can rest assured that they will end fatally for you. I shan't shoot you dead. I shall plug you through the liver — just — there — d'you feel? And if that won't make you run straight, I'll attend to you some more. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are the passages to this strong room lighted?"

"They are."

Captain Kettle's foot shot out. "They are — what?"

"They are, sir."

"You're improving. Now let me warn you not to get tempted to slip off into any nice, quiet, gloomy corner. I've got eyes like a cat for the dark, and I'll shoot you, if you try that or any other game, before you have time to think. Quite understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"There's just one thing more. If you meet any of your friends on the way and the nature of the procession isn't clear to them, I leave you to make the necessary explanations. And look here, my lad, maybe you have not heard me talk in the tongues of this part of the world, but I'm a seafaring officer, and I can tell you I've a working knowledge of more languages than you ever heard of. Got that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then quick march! Miss Dubbs, I ask your pardon for walking in front of you, but for the moment it seems necessary. You needn't carry your finger on that trigger while you're walking. Rest it on the trigger guard — yes, like that — and then it will slip handily on to the place when it's wanted. That rifle pulls off a trifle easily. Go steady, Bergash. This is the rogue's goose-step you're giving us, not a foot-race."

Mahommed Bergash, Cambridge graduate, kaid of

the Western Atlas Berbers, and saint of the stock of the prophet, was cowed. Up till now he had seen in Captain Kettle the somewhat acid shipmaster and the creature of a whimsical owner; but of a sudden he recognized in him the incarnation of energy, and, if needs be, tragedy.

He fully grasped that Kettle would, if occasion demanded it, shoot him with as little compunction as he, Sidi Mahommed Bergash, would order the extinction of an inconvenient tribesman; and, in spite of himself, he was mastered.

The kaid was no coward. In ordinary tribal fighting with the Moroccan Moors he had stared death in the face a dozen times before, without awe and without tremor. But this was somehow different; the threat of death was a minor item; it was the sailor's tremendous personality that made his spirit bend.

He walked ahead as a docile guide. Twice in the wandering alleys of the house he met members of his household, and dismissed them elsewhere with a word: and finally, "That is the door, sir," he said. "May I drop one hand from my neck to open it?"

"Yes," said Captain Kettle, "open the door, hook up your hand again, and then march inside ahead of us."

In this ungracious procession then, Captain Kettle once more came into the society of his owner and his owner's sister, and Sir George Chesterman, on his part, could not have been more surprised if the em-

peror of China had walked in to pay an evening call.

Miss Chesterman, it was clear, was on the verge of a demonstration. The affair, it is true, had gone much further than she ever intended; she had, in fact, been horribly frightened (and with very good cause); but her passion for Captain Kettle was still hot, and she had it in her to have thrown wild arms of gratitude round his neck, and hailed him as her world and her preserver.

But the sight of that acid, little, precise man with the red torpedo beard had a damping effect on hysterics, and something she caught in the eye of her fellow-woman clenched her self-restraint. Miss Dubbs might be in mortal danger, but to her employer's shrewd vision she was glorious with triumph.

"Sir," said Captain Kettle to Sir George, "I gather that this swine of a saint has been misbehaving himself. That being the case, I take it you will not care to stay longer under his roof."

Sir George Chesterman laughed ruefully. "So great is my distaste for his hospitality that I'd give all I possess to be back once among the friendly cockroaches on the *Wangaroo*. But I suppose one might as well wish to be in the moon. How in the world did you get here, Skipper?"

"Walked, sir. It struck me that I might be useful to you, as owner. So I came. I propose we ride back, and that is a thing this man Bergash is going to

arrange, if you will authorize him to do so. But before letting him proceed to that, I want to know if you have any complaints to make that you would like me to take payment for out of his skin?"

"I will cancel everything for a free passage to the sea."

"And you, miss?"

"No, no. Only get me away."

"Right, miss. Then if you, sir, and your sister, and Miss Dubbs will kindly make the most of this uncomfortable room for the next ten minutes, I will take Bergash outside again and have a little heart-to-heart talk with him over certain arrangements for the comfort of all of us. You have the Winchester. I'll leave you also this Hopkins Allen, which I find too straight in the stock for my particular brand of fancy shooting."

CHAPTER XXIV

A CHARGE OF CAVALRY

THE one and only gateway to the Bergash fortress, as I have recorded above, was just wide enough for the passage of a gravid cow. The middle of the arch is higher to-day than the original architect intended, because in the course of centuries the humps of passing camels have worn a central gutter out of the hard limestone. The wall at that point is fourteen feet thick of solid masonry, and above the gateway are the usual conveniences for pouring boiling lead on unwelcome callers.

There were iron spikes on the top of the wall above the gate, and through many centuries these had been decorated with the heads of the kaid's enemies — the old heads being refreshed from time to time by those of more recent cropping.

But when the latest saint returned from the lands of the infidel with a rabbit-skin B. A. hood in his saddle-bags, and a certain impatience for conservative customs, he had ordered the last selection of heads to be thrown away, and since then he had not renewed them.

All places have their customs, and though the reasons for many of them have been wiped away dur-

ing the passage of years, the customs remain. In the Bergash fortress it was a habit, when you were going abroad, to bedeck your camel with all his elaborate furniture in the street outside your own front door. When it was all nicely in position, you marched off to the one entrance gate of the fortress, stripped your beast to the bare hair (or mangy skin), squeezed him out through the doorway, and carried the trappings through the hole in the wall yourself.

Afterward you reassembled your ship of the desert and his furniture on the narrow causeway outside. That was all excessively inconvenient, and when there was a rush on, dangerous. Camels, and loads, and even passengers have many a time been levered over the edges of the causeway and crashed down a good ninety feet to the rocks below when the brutes really began to snarl and wrestle.

But there was probably a good reason for the custom in the past, though that reason is forgotten now. Anyway, it is worthy of record that the latest kaid, Sidi Mahommed, was within an ace of losing his valued life by being carried over the causeway edge by a rearing camel, and Captain Kettle saved him by shooting the brute in mid-air, and lugging his holiness off its back just as he was in the very act and article of toppling off to destruction below.

"I have to thank you for my neck," the kaid acknowledged. "I very nearly provided my countrymen with a new saint, and left them without a successor."

"Say 'sir', when you address me," said Kettle un-

graciously, "and order out another deck-house and a camel that's been properly broken. And tell your groom to jump lively."

The kaid gave sharp orders in Berber, and his men flew to carry them out. "You make things very awkward for me, sir," he said rather querulously. "I tell you that only our women folk, and babes, and wounded men, travel in these deck-houses, as you are pleased to call them. A man looks ridiculous in our eyes in such a conveyance."

"You will look ridiculous in anything I please. You say wounded men travel in them. You'll qualify as one of those if I have much more of your lip. Here's the order of the march: a covered camel carrying the two ladies, then Sir George on that horse which is trying to kick him off, and can't, with you and me on another covered camel bringing up the rear."

"Very good, sir. I may point out that if we don't have my usual escort, it's about a pound to a brick we get mopped up by some of those enterprising coast tribes which you disbelieve in, but which I have before had the honor of telling you have paid a good many attentions to you and the *Norman Towers* already."

Captain Kettle winced. The kaid's words had a way of coming true. "Very well. Order up your men to fall in behind. Only remember that if they play games, you'll be the first to pay."

To give the Berbers their due, there was no southern dilatoriness about them. Moors or Arabs of the desert

would have taken half a day to get that *douar* under way; these men had the beasts on the move across the causeway inside the half-hour.

Kettle and his prisoner sat in seats slung on either side of their camel, and were jolted violently forward and aft by reason of the gait that amiable quadruped assumes, even on level ground; and when they began to descend the slopes of the mountains, Kettle who was new to it, thought he would be burst asunder. The kaid watched him for some miles with malicious amusement, and then twitched up his own clothes, and showed the ordinary camel-rider's belt.

"I should like to suggest, sir," said he, "that you take this strip of cloth (which, as you may see, is designed for the purpose) and bind yourself round like this. If you don't, you will probably come to pieces, and remain so for the rest of your natural career."

"Thank you," said Kettle, and followed out the expert's suggestion, marveling the while it should have been made. "Probably to lull my suspicions," he told himself promptly, "so that he can get the drop on me, and put his ugly fingers once more on the owner and the ladies." And he watched his blue-eyed fellow-passenger with extreme narrowness.

The camels set the pace at a steady three and a half miles an hour, uphill and down dale, no more, no less. They swung on, remorseless as destiny, and the cavalry escort jingled in their wake. They journeyed on throughout the cool night, taking a far shorter route than the circuitous one by which Kettle had traveled;

and when day began to show in the higher layers of the atmosphere, they were already among the lower slopes of the foot-hills.

"I don't know whether you are asleep, sir," said the kaid.

"I'm not."

"Then perhaps you are a little dull in your hearing. But there's pretty heavy firing ahead of us."

"Are you sure it isn't the surf on the beach and on those reefs?"

"There is that as well. But there's firing, all right. You know I'm used to picking up these sounds."

"You're right; you've good ears. I suppose it means that your men are attacking my steamboat. Well, McTodd will attend to them efficiently. But, by James! I can't afford to miss more of the scrap. Here you, tell your drivers to hurry these camels."

The saint called an order. "By the way," he added, "I don't know if you still go on the simple principle of disbelieving everything I say. But if you don't, I may mention that the people who are kicking up a row ahead aren't my men at all."

"Then who are they?"

"The same crew who've been worrying you all along. They live on the coast here. There are Moors among them, and men from the Sus tribes, and Arabs of the deserts to the South, with a few Twaracks thrown in, and perhaps here and there a Berber, who has been chucked out of my place for

misbehavior. They're a mongrel lot, very hard, and very savage, and very dangerous, and I'm sure you'll learn it with satisfaction — they'd just as soon cut my throat as yours."

"I hear you say it."

The saint turned to face his persecutor, and placed a lean small hand on the camel's hump, which throbbed and wavered between them. "Look here, Captain Kettle, you've hated me pretty tenderly since the first moment of our meeting, and I'm free to own I've detested you quite as much. But for the time being I want to propose a truce."

"I don't see cause for it."

"Man, hear sense. I don't care two straws whether you are killed in the next half-hour, or whether you are not. I don't care much if I am knocked on the head myself. But for the women I do care. I am — no, I won't put it that way. We both of us are very fond of one of them, and the fate of women who get into the hands of those howling devils down there is too awful to think about.

"With my escort to help we may get through, though I admit it's a thinnish chance. But if you insist on keeping me cooped up in this cubbyhole, the escort will begin to inquire directly why I'm here. You see, being rather a dissatisfied person, I've got a reputation of being in the thick of it when there's a skirmish going, and their curiosity on the matter will be natural enough. When they do begin to put in their questions, I suppose you'll shoot me out of hand,

and proceed to enjoy yourself among the escort. Well, that would be all very interesting as a side issue, but it doesn't strike me as the best way of looking after the ladies' interest."

"Or Sir George's," Kettle admitted. "And he's my owner. By James! it strikes me I've come very near to neglecting duty."

It was a bitter pill to have a home truth like this thrown against him by Sidi Bergash. But Captain Kettle always had an exact sense of fairness. He thought a moment, and then he held out a hand. "I thank you, Mr. Bergash," he said simply, "for reminding me of what's my duty. May I ask if you're open to accepting employment?"

The Berber chief saw the point and laughed. "As commander of your escort? I'll take it. My people have been mercenary soldiers off and on for some three thousand years and more, and although this will be my first bit of hired service, there is no reason why I should kick at the tribal custom. The only thing left to settle is, I think, the pay. We mercenaries guarantee fidelity, of course, as long as the pay suits us, and is forthcoming regularly. But when that stops, why then we hold ourselves free to chop round and serve under another flag."

"Pay?" repeated Captain Kettle, and pulled vexedly at his red torpedo beard.

"Why not? You serve Sir George for pay yourself, I suppose?"

"I do. But you! you quite took me in with your

tales of gold-dust and the rest of it. I never dreamt you were out for your ten or fourteen pounds a month."

Again the kaid laughed. "Pardon me, but your ideas are so eminently British. You think that hard cash is the cure and pay for everything. Why, throughout all my people's soldiering through all the centuries, I never heard they served for money. Some of them — the slingers especially — like the men of the Balearic Islands, took wine and women for their pay; others asked for ornaments for their friends at home, and some went as mercenaries for the sheer sport of the thing. But for myself"— the blue eyes looked keenly —"would it surprise you to hear that I am like an Islander of the Balearics?"

"Yes," said Kettle with a happy flash of memory. "They fought for a fee of women and wine, but also they fought naked. Now you are clothed; you've been to college at Cambridge, and you aren't going to bargain like a naked savage."

"*Touché,*" said the Kaid, throwing up a slim finger to his head-rope.

"And, curse your impudence, there's my Winchester to beat time with. Here, make this earthquake of a camel heave to, and let's taste God's air again from the top of horses. I'm choked in this blanket-topped hansom. Now you've remembered you're a white man, the thing's all simple, and why you couldn't have done it before, and saved me all this bother and language, beats me."

"A man must be a fool sometimes, I suppose," said the kaid shortly, "and the other was my day. Take this black horse: he's my own, and you'll like him. I'll ride that bay. If it comes to a charge, I need hardly say, don't go at it hell for leather. We've got to keep back to camel's pace. Ah, good morning, Chesterman. Captain Kettle and I have both come to the conclusion that we've been behaving like a pair of idiots, and so we've arranged to ride level through what's ahead. I'm sure you'll be delighted to join, and give your old yeomanry tricks a chance."

"Hum," said Sir George, who was feeling sore.

"I'll ride ahead if you like," said the saint, "and you can shoot me in the back if I still look doubtful."

The big man shrugged the shoulders inside his loose untidy coat. "If I trust a man at all, I trust him right through. If the skipper says you're all right, that'll do for me. What's that ahead? A cavalry flanking party, by jove!"

The kaid gave a sharp order, and the escort cantered up and formed round the camels. There were twenty-five of them, all told, so that the *douar,* with the camel drivers and British, numbered in all some five and thirty souls.

"Why are they wearing respirators?"

"Twaracks," said the kaid shortly. "By your leave I'll just try an experiment." He put thin fingers between his bearded lips and blew a high-pitched whistle. It squealed out into the night, two long blasts and a short, all on the same note; and then after a pause

he blew two short blasts and a long, half a tone lower.

The squadron leader of the Twaracks threw up a long-barreled gun, and his men halted. The saint wheeled his bay clear of the others, so that he was a plain mark to see, or be shot at. The squadron leader of the black troop gazed a moment, acknowledged the other with a gun-wave, then wheeled his horse and galloped back into the shadows by the way he had come, with his horsemen thudding at his heels.

"Friend of yours?" asked Captain Kettle.

"Nothing of the sort. Didn't I tell you he was a masked Twarack? He's a pirate of the desert out yonder to the south and east, and I guess he'd come in here to raid the raiders who appear to be raiding your steamer. Let's hope he'll continue to do it."

"You seemed to know his helm signals?"

"Precisely. And may I suggest, my good sir, that you don't know all the international codes? You Europeans are in the very infancy of long distance signaling. And even when we others in Africa show you how to do the trick, you don't seem able to learn. By jove! look out now. Here's the real thing."

A howling mob in white billowy draperies poured out from behind a shoulder of the sand-hills, and the night kindled and roared with the discharge of their guns. But the range was too far for the inaccurate muzzle-loaders to be effective, and barring a camel slightly hit (it was not that which carried the ladies), no damage was done.

The damaged camel was allowed to drop behind, and the others were flogged and dagger-pricked into something nearly approaching speed. The enemy were hard at work reloading; but charging and priming a musket of true Moroccan build is a work of art and time, and before more than a dozen of the weapons could be hurriedly squibbed off against them, Captain Kettle, the saint, and Sir George Chesterman, riding abreast, smashed down into the middle of the enemy.

Each did terrible work with his own weapon. Sir George had borrowed a mace (that might well have been carried in the Crusades) from one of the escort, and acted and felt, to use his own subsequent expression, like a butcher gone mad. The saint, with reins loose, and steering the bay with his knees, used both hands to the Winchester, and did not miss a shot, although he opened fire thirty yards away from the line.

But Captain Kettle, who rode that ramping black stallion as a sailor rides, kept his head in this his first cavalry charge, and did more damage than any of them. He was conscious enough of his bad horsemanship not to risk fancy shots. He chose his man with deliberate aim, and did not pull trigger till his revolver's muzzle rested on the victim's clothes.

Nothing but this desperation could have saved him from being killed. The mongrel crew along the beach were every man of them as brave as he; but when they saw his pistol muzzle set fire to jellab after jellab, they

called one to another that Shaitan rode on the Sidi's bridle hand, and that it was time to be gone.

The attackers broke through, rallied, and charged back again toward the rising dawn. The camels, with legs flying to all the compass points, sprawled along in their midst, and the deck-houses on their backs lurched and pitched like mark buoys in a tideway. But no sturdy wall of raiders waited for them this time. They drove their horses through the skirts of a rout, and clubbed and stabbed and slashed at white-winged fugitives.

"Pull up," bawled Kettle, "and let the rest go. Slow down, Sir George. Halt there, you son-of-a-saint, and give me a chance with this devil-possessed black horse of yours. He's worried two men with his teeth, and he'll eat you next if you don't get out of range. By James! do you spawn of the mountains hear me? Halt! Halt where you are. And now wheel. Wheel back to the lagoon, or I'll turn loose this horse at you. Sir George, I'm the last man to spoil a fight when one offers, but we've the ladies with us, and presently, if you hammer them any more, these jokers in the white nightgowns will remember they're quite eight to one, and they'll turn and eat us without salt. Sir, shake yourself together, and think of your sister, and, anyway, give me that damn club. Give it to me, I say — I'm sorry if I've hurt your wrist, but you've offered obedience, and it's my habit to see that orders are carried out. Saint, I've reloaded my gun, and if you don't whistle your men off riding their

horses over those fellows on the ground, by the living James! I'll empty six saddles."

"Perhaps we've done enough," grasped the burly Sir George.

"They've put up a good fight, sir," said that connoisseur, Captain Owen Kettle, "and they've got their gruel, and my orders are that the thing finishes there. Away we go for the beach now, and get the ladies out of that earthquake they've been forced to ride on this last half-hour. You'll please to remember that they've missed all the fun and only had the shaking, and I'm afraid we shall find them in baddish preservation."

CHAPTER XXV

SALVAGED

DAY was lit by this time and the chill had slipped away, and the air was already beginning to warm up toward that baking temperature on which the edge of the Sahara rests so much of its evil reputation.

The battle had been fought in a valley of the dunes, and the vanquished tribesmen had scattered away in the direction of their villages, north, east, and south. To the west, over a low line of hummocks lay the lagoon.

"Shall we find the *Wangaroo* still there?" wondered the kaid.

"Don't know," said Sir George. "These gentry may have captured her, or at least driven her away to sea."

"She'll be there and untaken," said Captain Kettle shortly. "I left McTodd in charge, sir, and though he may have failings, and be argumentative when he's near drink, when it comes to looking after the interest of the owner who pays him, Mr. McTodd is as efficient as the king of England."

But in spite of these confident words, anxiety presently crept into Captain Kettle's eyes. "We should

have raised her mast trucks before this above those sand-hills," he told himself. And presently, when he could hold in his patience no longer, he clapped the sharp heels of his stirrup-irons into the ribs of the black stallion, and galloped to the crest. The lagoon lay clear before him, with the spouting reefs and islets at its farther side. The anchorage was deserted.

"My great James!" muttered Captain Kettle, "where's my ship, and what do I do next?"

But even as he stood there, a stiff little mounted figure standing out clearly against the farther dunes, he had been seen by some sharp observer, and after a preliminary huskiness, the deep boom of the *Wangaroo's* enormous siren hummed through the air, away on his left hand.

He turned sharply. Yes, there she was, the little beauty, down at the other end of the lagoon, close, in fact, to the *Norman Towers*. But in the name of wonder what was this? Foam bubbled from her tail and lay round her in a hoary ring. Her engines were running, and yet she did not appear to move. Aground? No chance of it. He had sounded every bit of the lagoon at that end, and was prepared to swear before a Board of Trade inquiry that she had at that very moment ten fathoms of water under her bottom.

He forced the black horse down the slope, and then galloped south along the hard beach, waving the others to follow him.

Half a mile farther on, when he had got the steam-

boats clear of one another, he saw why the *Wangaroo* did not move ahead. She was tethered by a heavy wire hawser. The other end of the wire, which was as taut as an iron bar, led in through one of the *Norman Towers'* hawse-pipes. It was obvious she was trying to tow. It was equally obvious she could not do it, and Captain Kettle cursed Mr. Neil Angus McTodd, unqualified second engineer and acting-captain of the *Wangaroo,* with maritime point and fluency.

"McTodd's polished his old coffee-mill of an engine till he thinks there's no limit to her power," Kettle told himself, "and now he's trying to pull a steamboat full of dead-weight, and anyway six times our size, through what practically amounts to a dock wall."

A moment later he pulled up sharply and took a quick cross-bearing of the *Norman Tower's* foremast against a cleft of the chocolate-colored rock behind. "By the living James," he cried, "he's budged her. She's moving ahead."

The Berber kaid pulled up alongside him. "I thought you and McTodd decided that the local ragamuffins had built that ship up inside a coffer-dam that weighed about a million tons of solid stone?"

"I saw the stone myself," said Kettle shortly, and looked at his watch. "It's bang on the top of high water this minute, and now they've got a move on her she's coming off like a bar pulled through a keg of tallow. Look at those links of cable hopping in through her port hawse-pipe. Mac's laid out an

anchor ahead, and he's heaving on that as well as with the old girl's own steam on her own windlass. You can see the leak of it now through the escape. Great James! why can't I find a boat?"

But the engineer in charge of the salvage operations was not the man to break off just then for the mere pleasure of being superseded by his superior officer. Mr. McTodd stood on the forecastle of the *Norman Towers* enjoying himself hugely.

He was wet through and dripped brine as he stood; his overalls were smeared with every variety of sea impurity from black grease to the red rust of iron. There was seaweed in his beard and an oozy red cut on the bridge of his nose. He exuded a mixed aroma of whisky, competency, and authority, and from Trethewy, the mate on the *Wangaroo's* upper bridge, to the meanest no-nation deck-hand awaiting orders on the *Norman Towers,* all within ear-shot were ready to jump to do his bidding.

Inch by inch, and then foot by foot, the *Norman Towers* hove up to her anchor, and the windlass engines, which had strained hard to make a quarter of a turn at a time under an extra full head of steam, began to send up a steady rhythmical clatter, and to make the deck beneath them buckle and shake.

"Go it, old girl," said Mr. McTodd. "Gosh, but this is scraping the barnacles finely off your belly." He raised his voice to a throaty bellow and hailed a cluster of men who lay behind a barricade of coal bags on the poop: "Aft there; are you keeping a bright

lookout? If another shot comes aboard from the shore without your shooting first, I'll baptize some more of ye with a three-quarter-inch spanner. Kindly remember I've no' put ye there just for decorative purposes, ye lop-eared aliens. D'ye hear me, you Schwereinsen?"

"Aye, aye, saire."

"I don't know who it was that was playing the devil's delight just now behind those sand-hills," continued Mr. McTodd, this time to the undersized fireman who was attending to the windlass engines beside him, "but by the pleasure somebody seems to be taking over the scrap, it seemed vara like as if our Old Man had scraped clear, and was coming back here to stir up trouble. Gosh! I'd give a thumb to think yon was true."

"There's the skipper, sir, just rode up on a black 'orse to the top of that sand-'ill. Looks to me by the way 'e's a-shakin' 'is fist 'e's letting loose a mouthful of language."

"Bite off your tongue, you mutinous son of a Whitechapel tripe-hawker. Man, I have seen creatures more worthy than you fair smashed to a jelly for speaking so of the Lorrd's anointed. And anyway, abusing the skipper's an amusement I resairve for mysel'. Waving, is he? I'll let him wave his arrums from their sockets and his whip-lash of a tongue from its roots before I pleasure him by sending a boat that'll bring him off to interfere here. By gosh, this is my funeral, and no other corrpse need apply."

And so, like another commanding officer before him, Mr. N. A. McTodd turned a blind eye to all shore signals till he had completed the work he had set his mind on, and saw the *Norman Towers* hung to her anchor with clean deep water all round her, and had cast off the heavy wire towing-hawser from the *Wangaroo,* and bidden Trethewy drop his hook alongside. But when all this was completed he sent off a boat, and piously anticipated the enjoyment of seeing Kettle in a furious rage at having all the difficult work done for him.

But that small mariner read the scheme of Mr. McTodd's ambitions (as he and others were rowed off), and with an effort pulled his temper into hand, and resolved not to allow himself to be drawn for the Scot's wicked gratification.

Instead he stretched out a cordial hand. "Mac," he said, "it's clever of you. How in James did you manage to do it?"

The Northerner's jaw dropped. He was losing the sport he had promised himself. "It looks as if I'd gone beyond your orders," he said pointedly.

"I didn't leave you behind in charge because you were reliable," Kettle told him sharply, "but because you were the best I had."

"Man," retorted the Scot, "I kenned fine you undervalued me, and it is just that knowledge that's impelled me to miracles. Ye saw for yourself how impossible it was ever to get this rusted old cargo-box into deep watter again, and here you now see it's been

done. You, and the British Board of Trade, and a few others, can never be convinced of my qualifications, and I'm put to this perpetual strain of perforrming miracles just for the sake of my ordinary professional credit."

"You've been drinking again, among other things."

"And for why not? Drinking, say you? Man, I tell you the Archbishop of York who's an Aberdonian, yes, or even the moderator of Free Kairk of Scotland, would have lapped guid whisky if he had had it, as a counter-irritant to the strain I've been put to. As a firrst example: how many of those ducks you left in my charge do ye think can swim?"

"I never took the census of them."

"Pairfectly. Weel, I did. It seemed (on inquiry) there were three who said they could, and twenty-three who couldn't. Man, you'll barely believe it, but I've taught twenty-two."

"Now look here, Mac, pull yourself together and tell a straight tale. Twenty-three you said a second before. Which is it? And anyway, what has swimming to do with pulling the *Towers* out of that bay?"

"Man, dinna' be offensive. Your nationality is against you, I ken fine, but fight against it, man, fight against it." Mr. McTodd shredded tobacco for his pipe, and scoured out an evil-smelling dottle into his hand. "Twenty-three, as I said, I tackled, and twenty-two I taught. The odd swimmer got mislaid, and whether the sharks got him, or cramp, or whether

he started to swim back under water to Cardiff where he came from, and lost his course, I canna' tell you.

"Anyway, I was minus his services, and for that and no other reason I mourned his memory. But for the rest, I turned them into mermaids, and, gosh! you should have seen some of them strip. They'd have made a sculptor faint. We got a fire in the donkey boiler on the *Towers,* and persuaded her number one winch to turn, and rigged a derrick. They'd a big iron tip-bucket in number three hold that they'd used for shipping that copper ore, and that with holes punched in was just the implement I wanted. Ye see the game?"

"Go on."

"I'll trouble you for a match."

"Here's my last. For the lord's sake, go on."

"In due time," said the engineer, lighting his pipe, and speaking between sucks. "We lowered the bucket on to the top of the dam, and then divers had to fill it by hand with stones. I led them. Man, I lived under water like the King Neptune they tell of in the wind-jammer days, and those of the hands that didn't dive well or stay down the prescribed time, I beat over the head with rocks away down there under the surface of the sea. And you, who have been enjoying yourself on a circular tour round all the fashionable sights of the neighborhood, come back and throw hints about the whisky!

"Man, in your ear, it's vara humorous; it was no' your whisky at all, or the ship's. It was from the

owner's private sea store that he went away too rattled to leave locked. I ask you, how's that for humor?"

Sir George Chesterman had come into the chart house in time to hear this last. He laughed cheerfully. "That's all right, Mr. McTodd. The necessity of commandeering medical comforts in time of stress is recognized by act of parliament. Then did you and that splendid crew pull down that enormous embankment by hand, and in deep water?"

"Our policy," said the engineer, emphasizing his point with an explanatory pipe-stem, "was to cut a gap big enough for the steamboat to pass through at the top of flood. We'd no ambition, ye'll understand, for leaving pairmanent structural improvements to this part of Africa, and when we'd a bucketful of the stone hoisted above water level, we hooked it on to another derrick chain aft and dumped it over the stern. That was where trouble began with the natives. They seemed to object to our spoiling the contours of their dock."

"Have they been sniping you all along?"

"If the money those misguided heathen wasted on powder and slugs had been spent on whisky, and distributed in Glasgow, half of the second city in the empire would have been happy for a day. And their firing, thanks to my ingenuity, was all wasted. It was vara humorous to see the way they went on bombarding the coal bags I erected to shelter the men. We talked back at them, too, in a language they could understand.

"I let the watch on deck — I mean those that weren't engaged for the moment on the diving — take their rifles and loose off cartridges from behind coal bags. I hear that some of them quite pride themselves on being marksmen, and that bald-headed old pirate, with experience in the China seas, says he's a further bag of thirteen to his discredit. They shot at every native they could see. Man, its laughable to think they bombarded the saint's own messengers, and nearly lost us yon cargo of gold."

"Lost which?" Captain Kettle and Sir George Chesterman bounced in their chairs and put the question simultaneously.

"You needna' shout. Your nerves are suffering from drought, and as an expert I should recommend a lubricant. The saint sent the gold to foot his bill all right, and there was a message which said there was no hurry about the rifles, as you'd all be staying with him for some time."

Sir George and Captain Kettle glanced at one another. The same thought flashed across each of them. Had Sidi Mohammed Bergash an idea that with the gold once on board, the *Wangaroo* would vanish forthwith from his calculations? It was little he knew McTodd.

"I offered the messengers some slight refreshment," said the engineer, "and as they wouldna' take it owing to releegious scruples, I just swallowed it mysel' to prove to them the superiority of my own Northern creed, and then I locked up the gold in a

state-room, and got on with my employment. But I'd an idea there might be mischief in the background, so I gave the old chief a job. He's a very intelligent man, the chief engineer of the *Wangaroo,* if he's provided with ideas, and a working drawing, and has tools put into his hands just as they are required."

"What on earth are you maundering about now?"

"You ken yon brass signal-gun on the old *Towers* they bombarded us with as we came into the lagoon?"

"Yes, a useless toy."

"Aye, there speaks your layman's ignorance. Man, I gave our chief the idea — it was a brilliant little thing of my own, but I'll not waste the details on your unmechanical intelligence — and he put a rifling into the barrel, and turned up some scrap brass we had into shells, and fitted them with studs to correspond with the rifling. For want of a better explosive we filled the shells with water, and I tell you a fine din they made when they burst. She'll carry three-quarters of a mile, will that twopenny brass cannon in her new state, and one shell she threw landed among a committee meeting of true believers and sent ten of them there and then to the place where they fry gratis. I watched it myself with the bridge binoculars. Gosh, you should have seen the old chief. He'd let no one sairve the gun but himself. You may call him cynical, you may know him to be sarcastic, but my idea is that the worrld has mislaid in him a natural artilleryman."

The carpenter rapped smartly at the door, opened it, and waited to be spoken to.

"Yes?" said Captain Kettle.

"I've sounded the *Towers* in every hold, sir. She's tight everywhere. So are all the compartments of the double bottom that I could get at."

"Very good," said Kettle, and the carpenter went out. "And what's your idea of her engines, Mac?"

"Weel, I have na' had time to take a turn out of them, and there's no denying that outwardly they're disgraceful. Any engines with sea water on them and three months' neglect would be that. But with three days' labor, and some good nursing, I don't see they would be any worrse than many of the marine engines that are now earning deevidends all over the seas. Gosh! there's that noisy-minded steward ringing the thing he calls a gong for supper. It would mean a bath at least for me if I was to come down, so with leave I'll stay in comfort as I am, and have a snack on deck. And so, Captain, as I see you're aching to beautify yourself, I'll leave ye. Aboot that bottle of brilliantine I begged the loan of —"

"I have none," snapped Kettle.

"Weel," drawled the Scot, "I've no' used the half of it," and muttering to himself "vara humorous," he pulled himself up and rolled out of the chart house.

"McTodd's a great taste for pulling your leg," said Sir George, as he followed more slowly.

"At sea," retorted Captain Kettle sharply, "I don't appreciate it. My idea is, sir, that the engine-room

should always give the deck officers proper respect. And by James, sir, if they don't know how, I'm the man to teach them."

Captain Owen Kettle ripped off jellab and head-robe and dropped them on the floor with a gesture of disgust. It is also on record that, punctual man though he is known to be, he was twenty minutes late when he sat down that night at the head of the table before the plate of tepid soup which the anxious steward had saved for him. But he was once more his spick-and-span self, and obviously pleased with the universe.

They had their after-dinner coffee out on deck under the wonderful African stars, and Captain Kettle found himself seated apart from the other men, but near Miss Violet Chesterman by that lady's skilful management. Her face was white and rather drawn, and there were heavy shadows under her eyes, all things that were easily accounted for by the recent distressing experiences she had undergone. But there was a brightness about her talk which showed that a high spirit still ran within her, and there was an indefinable something in her attitude that made the little sailor feel vaguely restive and uneasy.

She talked composedly over recent events — her own departure from the *Wangaroo,* which she frankly stigmatized as foolish, the arrival at the fortress, and her unexpected treatment there.

"I believe Sidi Bergash really believed I would marry him, though to give him his due he never did put it in so many words. But there is no doubt that

both my brother and I were in extreme danger, and the way you got us out of his clutches is a thing that never can be properly rewarded." . . . And she said more, much more, in the same strain. It was flattering, it was fluent, yet somehow without being able to find out any definite cause of offense, Kettle found that it all in a vague way jarred on him. Up till now he had always enjoyed and, indeed, looked forward to Miss Chesterman's conversation, as of course she meant he should; and to-night's change disquieted him. For half an hour he listened there in the warm night under those southern stars without being able to define even to himself the subtle change that had come over her manner, but at last with a flash it dawned on him. There was a taint of patronage over this talk to-night. It was intended that he should grasp that indiscretions in the past were indiscretions, and that she was the great lady, and that he was the hired mariner.

All Captain Kettle's rebellious nature leaped into arms at the discovery — and as promptly became limp and submissive. She had made a mistake; he had made a mistake; and if this was her way of putting things straight, he ought not to be the one to complain.

"And now," said she, "I must speak to you on a more intimate matter, and that is about your attachment to my mai — to Emily. My eyes have told me what your feelings are in the matter, and both my brother and I wish to see you comfortably settled

down. So we have thought out what seems to us a suitable wedding present, and my brother — ah, here's Rex, and there he is. George!"

"Yes, old girl. Having a talk with the skipper? Did you tell him our little scheme?"

"I left it to you."

"Well, Captain, it's this. In a moment of stress I told you I'd give everything I possessed in the world to be carried safely back on board here, and as you're the man who's done the magic trick, you are naturally entitled to the pay. Of course when it comes to the point I'm going to tell you I didn't really mean what I said, and all the rest of it, and so will you kindly waive the whole claim, and accept the *Norman Towers*, as she stands, in settlement?"

Captain Kettle swallowed hard. "I couldn't, sir, I really couldn't. I do appreciate your splendid generosity, but this is beyond all reason. Eight and a half per cent. is what you promised me and that I'll take in all gratitude. But the whole; I couldn't. Why, ship and cargo together are worth two hundred thousand pounds."

The big man put his hands in the pockets of his loose shooting-coat, and made a mocking bow. The big retriever opened a laughing mouth. "If I value my only sister at one hundred fifty thousand pounds, which really seems an impertinently low figure, that only leaves fifty thousand pounds for myself, and in justice to my constituents I couldn't put it at less. But, Skipper, I prefer not to look on it in that light.

I owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude that I can never repay. You are, I trust, going to marry Miss Dubbs, who is a girl I have a great liking for, and it will give me real pleasure if you will accept from my sister and myself a wedding present which will, we believe, provide for you comfortably. You'll find papers in this envelope which will form an efficient transfer of the steamer from myself as full owner to you. . . . And now, Violet, you're dead tired, and so am I. You'd much better go below and turn in. That's what I am going to do myself. We'll see Captain Kettle at breakfast to-morrow morning."

. . . . . .

An hour later Mr. Forster, the elderly second mate, knocked at the chart-house door, opened, and went in. He stood for a moment sniffing noisily at a smell of frangipani, and then looked heavily round the angle of the door. On the plush settee sat Captain Kettle and Miss Dubbs, her arm round his neck, his left arm round her trim waist, their right hands clasped, their lips together.

The second mate was a stupid man, and prided himself on his stupidity. "Captain," he said, "I've to report —"

"Get out."

"To — to report that —"

"Get to blazes out of this, you blundering elephant, or I'll throw you into the ditch. What in thunder do you mean coming into my room unasked? Get out, you armor-plated idiot, and shut the door."

Mr. Forster retreated slowly and heavily, shut the solid teak door to within five inches of the jamb, and fastened it there on the hook. Through the gap he stolidly completed his message. "There's a ship's life-boat rowing in here from the entrance of the lagoon. She's manned by white men. The moonlight shows them clearly."

"Callers at this time of night?" said Captain Kettle lightly, but within him he was conscious of a queer sinking feeling, and, as he confessed afterward, a premonition of disaster. But to his officer he added in his usual brisk tones, "Very good. You needn't report again unless they seem to want help, or till they come up alongside. Keep a bright lookout. And please remember I'm busy, and do not wish to be disturbed unless on ship's business."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SURVIVING FARNISH

"WE'LL have to be married in the Church of England," said the little sailor, "because that's the tightest way of getting the splice made, but after you're Mrs. Kettle, I take it there'll be no more church for us, Miss Dubbs, dear."

"I suppose not, Captain darling, if you wish it," said that fine young woman rather wistfully. "But with this splendid fortune you've got, we could afford it, and there's no doubt about where the best people go to."

Captain Kettle went on, with the bright fixed eye of a man who sees the dearest project of his life within reach. "I was brought up part Bible Christian, and part Methodist New Connection. I've had the advantage also of trying the Wesleyans, the Spiritualists, and the Plymouth Brethren, and I've seen good points in all of them. You hear that grand instrument the harmonium in all their chapels, and there's no doubt their people do stick together. But between ourselves they all seem to me, when you come to analyze them, to lack what I might call 'snap', and they're certainly short on poetry. Now I believe that you and I, Miss Dubbs, dear, when you are Mrs. Ket-

tle, can run a brand-new religion of our own, and derive much benefit. I don't believe (as many do) in starting in a seaport town, and getting big congregations straight away. I know you can do that. A fool of a sailor (when he's ashore) will go and listen to any old tale, especially if it's set to a hymn tune. My idea is to set up in a country place, and the lonelier and more poetical, the better. I want poetry in mine, and hills, and rocks, and the blue sky over all, and the tinkle of a river flowing fast. You've never been in Wharfedale, dear; you told me so. But I was there once for a week-end, and I thought that if ever I'd the chance I'd buy a farm there that I know of, and rent a small chapel that is to let near it. You don't know what poetry there is in sheep and cows till you've lived near them."

"No, dear, but I could learn, though privately I believe I should do best with hens. But I think the chapel's a splendid idea. Besides, that sort of thing has always what I call more permanent interest in it than just gadding about to music-halls, which is what some girls like. It gives you a position at once, too, when you're known to be leader of the chapel set."

"It would be a splendid thing to be head of a religion of our own that was recognized by Whitaker's Almanack and all the great authorities. 'Particular Methodists', I think, could be the name. 'Wharfedale Particular Methodists', perhaps, to distinguish it from imitations. And I wouldn't take any convert that offered, either. I'd make it select — and strict.

. . . And with money to back me up, unlimited money, as I suppose it will be when that copper ore's realized on, I could afford to run missionaries and send them out to the uttermost of the heathen whites — to Swansea, and to New York, to Cardiff, to Chicago and Glasgow even, and perhaps Manchester and New Orleans. . . . Yes, what is it? Come in."

The heavy hand of the old second mate was beating against the door panel. "It's that boat. She's alongside, and at the foot of the ladder. There's a party steering that looks like Noah, and as far as I can understand his jibber, he says the *Norman Towers* is his. Am I to let him and his people on deck? They're the raggedest looking crew of beach-combers I ever saw in all my going a-fishing. There's one of them seems to have gone clear loony. He's playing on the penny whistle. *Spanish Ladies* the tune is. He looks as pleased as if it was Saturday night and he was sitting on his own forecastle head."

Captain Kettle sighed heavily. "Miss Dubbs, dear, I've a bad feeling we've made those plans too soon."

"So have I. I feel as if pa, or an angel or somebody has only to utter a spell like 'Time, gentlemen, please,' and we'd all wake up, and the money would be back in Sir George's pocket where it rightly belongs." She pressed the little sailor tightly to her ample bosom. "But sleeping or waking I've got you. You're real."

"I hope so," said Kettle miserably. "And now, my dear, if you'll excuse me, I must go."

Already the boat's crew had shipped their oars and made fast their painter, and the helmsman, a blowsy old man with untrimmed hair and burst carpet slippers had swung himself heavily on the ladder, and was plodding up the side. His shoulders were humped with failure. The young successful shipmaster met him at the head of the gangway.

"Come on board, my man, and let's see what we can do for you. I suppose it goes without saying you've met misfortune."

"Aye, you may call it that, Mr. Kettle, me man, or beg pardon, Captain Kettle as I see you are now by the stripes on your cuff. Terrible smart fellows for uniform, all you young officers nowadays."

"Who are you? By James, if poor old Captain Farnish weren't drowned and dead, I should say — Here, man, just step over into the light."

The new-comer dried moist eyes with the back of his hand and laughed wearily. "It's a great mistake a man not being drowned when drowned he's reported to be. We've found that half a score of times when we've put in at places where there was a consul and tried to raise a loan to victual the boat. 'I want to draw on my owners for a pound,' I'd say, 'to buy biscuit and a can of beef,' I'd tell him, and the consul would prove to me from Lloyds' reports that old Captain Saturday Farnish was drowned along with all hands that sailed on the *Norman Towers,* and then

he'd pump out unpleasant talk about swindlers and confidence men before all the loafers in the office till I'd be fit to die of shame. Oh, I tell you, Captain Kettle, me man, the life of a shipmaster when he's alive is a dog's life, but when he's officially supposed to be dead (as you may be some day) it's plain hell."

Captain Kettle's mind flashed across to that comfortable woman in the bursting satins who lived in Merseyside Terrace, Birkenhead. "And you've never reported that you were alive?"

"I never had the heart to say the word, or a postage stamp to send it with."

"Then mother will have drawn your insurance?"

"There is none, Owen, me man. There's not a penny to draw. I got a bit irregular about my payments, being forgetful, owing to attacks of malaria, and the insurance has lapsed. It'll have been workhouse for the old woman and the girls, unless she's got a bit of washing, or unless the firm's done something for them, which isn't likely." He rubbed his sea-chapped hands together, and sniffed hungrily. "There's a rare tasty smell coming from below somewhere. Must be cooky's putting up a bit of a snack for the steward and himself before they turn in. D'you know, Owen, me man, an onion's a fruit I haven't touched for six months, and for that matter I haven't seen meat half a dozen times."

"Come away below, Captain. Mr. Forster, send the boat's crew forward, and see them well attended to and fed, and serve them out a good stiff tot of

grog. Come away, below, Captain, at once. This lady is Miss Dubbs."

"You must pardon me, miss," said the old man, "for being so upset at the idea of grub, but you see Chips — my carpenter, I should say — who was in the boat with me, was a heavy eater, and he provided the music, and it was the music alone that kept the men from turning down the job, and stepping ashore and staying there whenever they got the chance. The captain here, who's a musician himself, will tell you what Chips could do with the penny whistle."

"He could play," said the expert, "I'll admit that."

"He reminded me of that party in the poem that I've seen pictures of, who played the penny whistle so well that he lured away the rats from a whole town full of fat old fellows who at that time were seeing them. Lord, Captain, me man, fancy getting a knife and fork in one's fists, and sitting down before a plate on a table-cloth. No, Steward, don't give me beef. I've not got my teeth on me this evening. Yes, some of that salmon. You've no idea how I've thirsted and hungered after some nice tinned salmon, miss, since I've been threshing about in that murdering life-boat. To my mind there's nothing so tasty as tinned salmon, unless perhaps it's finnan haddie if you put enough vinegar on it just to damp the microbes."

The shaggy man sat at the end of the saloon table

eating steadily, eating as man only can eat after he has lived for months on the edge of starvation, and Miss Dubbs and Captain Kettle leaned elbows on the table on either side of him, and stared gloomily at one another and at him. Conversation came disjointedly, and between mouthfuls.

It appeared that when cargo shifted in the gale six months ago, and the *Norman Towers* lay helpless on her beam ends with the wind howling over her, Captain Farnish decided that she would sink, but made up his mind to go down with her after the manner approved by his tribe. He was "old and useless". He would "never get another ship". He would be "far better off comfortably drowned". There were institutions which "would help the widow of a shipmaster lost at sea," while "no institution on earth except the workhouse would assist the wife of a disrated, out-of-work sea-captain." But certain of the hands impelled thereto by the musically-minded carpenter lugged him with them into the boat and once there his old trick of seamanship saved the lot of them.—"We old shellbacks can handle open boats in heavy weather in a way that would surprise you brass-bound swells of the newer school, Owen, me man."— They, too, saw the *Norman Towers* instead of turning turtle, shake her cargo amidships again, and blow off before the gale, and Farnish tried desperately to follow, but lost her in the driving sea smoke. But he was then and later bitten with the

theory that she was either afloat somewhere, blowing about the seas, or neatly ashore and offering her cargo for salvage.

Thereafter his wanderings were worthy of Homeric verse. He was old, he was not too competent, he had no particular charm that I ever saw to attract men to him. He had neither money nor credit with which to buy provisions, and on the rare occasions when he went ashore — in Las Palmas, at Mogador, at Bathurst, and in the Cape Verdes — he was received with derision and insult. It seems they lived for the most part on fish that they caught themselves when inshore and sun-dried as best they could for the blue-water sections of their cruise. As regards water, they risked their lives a score of times in running the crazy boat through the surf when mad with thirst to fill her breakers.

Why the crew stuck by him is one of those things that seem to be in the teeth of all reason. His one explanation that they stayed for the mere pleasure of hearing the carpenter toot on the penny whistle is ridiculous, but frankly I have nothing much better to offer. There was neither gain, pleasure, nor advancement to dangle in front of the crew by way of lure, and, on the other hand, there was very certain starvation, hardship and danger to be earned in plenty. One can only conclude that for some obscure reason they must have loved the old man, and for that and no other possible cause they stuck to him.

It must have been the most hopeless kind of chase.

He was ignorant about the more modern niceties of currents, unsound on his trade-winds, hopelessly out of date on the theory of storms. His dull rule of thumb science could not even form a theory as to where they had drifted to. But from some obscure pricking of the thumbs he had faith that she was either afloat, or neatly cast ashore, but, at any rate, waiting for him.

"I knew I should hit upon the old girl at last if only I could induce the hands to keep on long enough," said Captain Saturday Farnish. "Did you happen to find my old pipe in the chart house by any chance, or had the niggers scoffed it? Chips lugged me away in such a hurry I hadn't time to slip it into my pocket. I should hate to lose that pipe. It's the one mother gave me the year I earned all my bonus."

"I have it in my own chart-room, on top. There was mother's photo, too. I took that also."

Captain Kettle swallowed hard. Mention of that unclean meerschaum always upset him.

"You're a good lad, Owen, me man, and I'm glad it's you that's met with luck. You're young, and you've all the world before you, and now you needn't work. I'm old, and I'm out of date, and nobody wants me. Eh, well, I wonder when I shall eat onions and tinned salmon again? Never, probably."

"To-morrow, if you like," said Captain Kettle.

"That's very good of you, Owen, me man. I suppose you'll give me a passage home. You'll find I'll not intrude. I am real glad that it's you that's picked

up the old *Towers,* and made a fortune out of her, and — and —"

"And ruined you."

"Well, you didn't set out to do it, and don't think I bear you malice, though if it had been any one else I should have been fit to tear his throat out. It's not for myself I care. It's poor mother I'm thinking about. She's been the best possible wife to me. I — I did look forward to letting her have the balance of her days in comfort." The old man's unkempt gray beard drooped dejectedly on his chest.

The steward came up to Captain Kettle with a respectful whisper. "I've made ready for the captain the room the African ladies had, sir, trusting that's your wish."

"Very good." Kettle put a hand on his guest's shoulder, and shook him gently. "I think you had better turn in."

"Qui' ri', my dear, qu' ri', mother. Had a mos' important business meeting t' attend. You may put down that Malacca in the hat-stand. Really no offense this time. Business negotiations entirely 'n your behalf, ol' lady, though unsuccessful I'm sorry to say. Future entirely hopeless. Help me to bed, mother."

"Here, let me help," said Miss Dubbs, with suspiciously shining eyes. "No, don't you bother, steward. The captain and I can manage."

. . . . . .

Once more they were in the chart house, sitting side by side on the settee. Miss Dubbs stole out a sympa-

thetic hand, and gripped Captain Kettle's with her very capable fingers. "It's been very hard for him, poor old man, but we have to face these misfortunes."

"Yes," said Kettle, and drew his hand away.

"I suppose you'd like to do something for him?"

"Yes," said Kettle, and rested his torpedo beard in the heel of his fist.

"It would be a charity if you did."

"No," said the little sailor, and stood briskly to his feet. "Miss," he said, "it'll be hard for you to understand, but that man's my old sea-daddy. His wife was all the mother I ever knew. The pair of them brought me up, and a hard enough pinch it must have been, but when there wasn't enough to go round, they were the ones that went without. That happened more than once. There were times when employment was scarce, and they were nipped, miss, badly nipped; but there was always tucker for me, and clothes, and school-pence, and that's what I'm remembering now. When first I came to sea, Mrs. Farnish — I used to call her mother, y' know, miss — she said, 'You'll look after the old man, Owen,' and I said I would, and I've just got to. You see, miss, she was all the mother I've ever known, and anyway, I never went back on my word. I couldn't throw charity to Captain Farnish, Miss Dubbs. He's got to have his ship back, with all that's in her in the way of cargo, just as she was given to me by Sir George. And now, Miss Dubbs, dear, I know what you think,

and you can say it presently. I know in my present state I'm no man for a splendid lady like you to marry, and so I want you please to consider our engagement at an end."

"You throw me off, do you, Captain?"

"If you put it that way."

"Then look here, young man, I'll sue you for breach of promise if you do as sure as my name's Miss Dubbs. After all the trouble I've had to get the man I wanted, I don't lose him like that."

"I'm just a pauper, and I don't think I'll ever be anything more. It will be work for mine all the days of my natural."

"Which is precisely what I looked forward to when I first permitted you to pay me attention at the Mason's Arms. I didn't mistake you for a bank manager in disguise, although you may have thought so."

The sailor clapped an enthusiastic arm round the lady's waist. "Miss Dubbs, my dearest, how splendid you are!"

"So that's all right," was her murmured retort. "You're mine, Captain, till death us do part, and don't you forget it. But it will be an upset for Sir George's plans."

"If you don't mind, we'll not tell Sir George. He doesn't know Captain Farnish, you see, and I should hate to have him think I was — well, you know what I mean. Time enough to transfer to the old man when we get home and the ore's realized on and the *Norman Towers* is sold.— It's — By James, how

dare you poke your unpleasant head in at my port-hole, McTodd?"

"Three o'clock in the morrning and the skipper courting his girrl. 'Oh, silver moon and Afric's stars, you've much to answer for.' G. R. Tennyson wrote that, and I aye thought it one of his finest poems. Man, but flirrting like this is a terrible example to some of the ship's company. Me, for instance."

"We're engaged," snapped Kettle.

Mr. McTodd rubbed his chin, and shut one eye. "Are ye telling me that as news?"

"It's the latest."

"Oh, vara humorous," said McTodd. "Puir young things, they've just discovered what this sma' worrld of a ship-board kenned since the day we first left Las Palmas. Miss, I kiss my hand to ye, and after I've been below to drink your health out of the chief engineer's whisky bottle which is under his bunk, I'll go to my chest, and see if I canna' find a suitable wedding present. But what I came to tell is this. That blue-eyed saint has swung off to the shore. Do ye think that man's straight, or just an African? And when is he going to take delivery of those Winchester rifles he's already paid for?"

THE END

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